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Land, 'Development' and 'Security' in Bangladesh and India: An Introduction

Katy Gardner and Eva Gerharz

- 1 Writing of the often violent processes of land expropriation in Bangladesh in which arable land has been reduced from 9 million hectares in the 1990s to around 8 million in the mid-2000s, Feldman and Geisler declare that the country is 'an epicentre of displacement' (2012: 973). In India, scholars have described similar processes, many focussing upon how state sponsored property speculation and business interests lead to the ongoing dispossession of farmers, whether in the form of Special Economic Zones (Levien 2011a, 2011b, 2012, 2013, Cross 2014), large scale mining projects (Padel & Das 2010), conservation (Münster & Münster 2012), agribusiness and aquaculture,¹ housing or industrialisation (Adduci 2009, Le Mons Walker 2008, Mishra 2011, Akram-Lodhi 2009, Münster & Strümpell 2014, Adnan 2013). Kathy le Mons Walker estimates that since Independence in India, over 30 million people have been displaced by 'development' (2008: 580), arguing that land is the biggest site of struggle in the subcontinent (Le Mons Walker 2008: 589). As land changes hands and usage, the implications for rural economies that were once based on agriculture are enormous. In most instances there are few economic opportunities for newly landless people, for even if the land has been cleared for Special Economic Zones or extractive industries, these rarely employ local people (Makki & Geisler 2011: 4, Levien 2011a, 2011b, Gardner *et al.* 2012). Rather, what awaits are increasing immiseration for those with the least social capital and opportunities for vast profits for those with the most, almost always resulting in a heightening of social and economic inequality (*cf.* Corbridge and Shah, 2013).
- 2 What sense are we to make of these processes? Whilst displacement and dispossession are hardly new to South Asia—the colonial period was characterised by the encroachment of land and forest by the Raj for railways, mines and plantations and Nehru's India by large scale infra structure, mining and industrial projects—the pace and scale of dispossession,

and the shift in the value of land from its productive use to its commodification, is notable in this, the neoliberal era of enclosure (Akram-Lodhi 2007). Crucially, in India the state has shifted from being the owner of industry in the post-Independence era to being a land-broker for private multinational and national corporations in the 2000s (Levien 2013), a period marked both by rapid economic growth and the persistence of poverty (Drèze & Sen 2013). This new space for officials and bureaucrats to broker land deals has transformed existing modes of governance with far-reaching consequences at all levels (Goldman 2011). Close relationships between business people and government officials, which have been described as 'crony capitalism', have not only shaped what has been commonly referred to as 'neoliberal India' (Münster & Strümpell 2014) but also contemporary Bangladesh, where hyper development is enabled by the state's neoliberal 'open door' policies. An emerging literature from India charts these transformations, focussing largely upon increasing inequality and impoverishment (cf. Corbridge & Shah 2013, Münster & Strümpell 2014) as well as the crisis of agriculture, impoverishment of farmers and exploitation of labour in the informal sector (cf. Harriss-White 2005, Harriss-White *et al.* 2009, Reddy & Mishra 2009, Mohanty 2005, Breman 1993, 2007, 2010, Lerche 2011, Siddiqui 2015).

- 3 Whilst much of this work rightly stresses the *effects* of neoliberalism, other work addresses the *process* of dispossession: the means by which changes of land use and differential access take place² and, indeed, the varying forms of resistance or compliance by different groups and individuals over time (see, for example, Levien 2011a, 2013, Feldman & Geisler 2012, Cross 2014). It is to the latter questions of process that this volume contributes. In particular we aim to flesh out issues raised by David Harvey's widely discussed concept of 'Accumulation by Dispossession' (Harvey 2003). Whilst this has been used by scholars to analyse processes of land loss (see, in particular, Gardner 2012, Levien 2011a, 2012, 2013, Münster & Strümpell 2014), the concept is frustratingly vague as to the actual techniques involved. For example, Harvey points to the collusion between states and corporations, but gives little detail of what this involves and has nothing to say on the role of local elites or the ideological justifications involved. As others have argued, the commodification of land is not always met with resistance by farmers; industrialisation may evoke aspirations and hope as much as fear and resistance (Cross 2014, Vijayabaskar 2010). Combined with this, the appropriation of agricultural land, commons and forestry for industrial use or infrastructure has long been justified by national or local plans of 'development' or 'security'. Only a few years ago concepts like 'environmental justice' highlighted that these development projects may have far-reaching ecological consequences which need to be analysed in relation to their socio-economic implications. Moreover, the very notion of 'dispossession' implies a straightforward transfer of rights in which those that once possessed are dispossessed. Yet as we shall see in the papers that follow, the local realities of land use, differential forms of access and property rights are often far more nuanced, involving complex interrelationships between groups of users, legality, the state, and customary forms of access, not to say cross cutting discourses of development, modernity, belonging and rights.
- 4 In order to interrogate these issues further, this volume brings together work from India and Bangladesh which explores three interlinked questions: (1) how different groups gain access to land, either via legislation, (re)negotiated customary rights, or material use (2) how rights and access are lost and restricted via collusions between states, the military

and private interests and the techniques of disappropriation and discursive formations used and (3) the responses to this, which indicate that simply framing the contestations and negotiations involved in terms of *local farmers'* resistance to corporations or states is too simplistic.

- 5 In this introduction we provide an initial framework for these questions. After exploring recent theoretical approaches to dispossession and land loss, an endeavor which is taken up in more detail in the subsequent paper by Adnan, we scope out the ideological apparatus of contemporary dispossessions—the discursive formations of 'development' and 'security'. After this we explore coalitions between states, corporations and the military. Finally, we turn to questions of violence, security and resistance. The volume is based on a panel on land dispossession, development and security held at the EASAS conference in July 2014. Originally our intention was to draw upon work from the entire South Asian region; our call for papers was however met only by researchers working in Bangladesh and India. The comparison between these two countries is instructive. Whereas we can witness rapid rates of land dispossession and corporatisation taking place all over South Asia, Bangladesh and India (particularly West Bengal) share similar historical processes. During colonialism, agricultural production in the Bengal region faced substantial transformations when the Zamindari system was reformed in the late 18th century. Zamindars now had control over the estate and the cultivators were transformed into peasants without rights (Lewis 2011: 50). Many of the estates were owned by high-caste Hindus during colonialism, who left East Bengal after 1947 and were replaced by wealthy Muslims. Lewis (2011: 57) shows that this produced vertical patronage and factional ties and prevented the emergence of peasant movements based on horizontal solidarity. In post-colonial West Bengal, however, such movements are firmly established—a contrast which is also reflected in the papers in this volume. India and Bangladesh also share a post-colonial emphasis on food security, which partly stems from the devastating consequences of colonial mismanagement of food stock during the 1940s. Meanwhile, India and Bangladesh have followed quite different paths in the institutionalisation of democratic rule. In contrast to India where democracy has been, despite some well-known deficiencies, firmly established, Bangladesh has struggled with authoritarianism since the subcontinent's partition. Thanks to communalism and subsequent nationalist ideals, ethnic divides have been high on the agenda when it comes to the distribution of land rights (see Feldman's paper). The historical and political contexts of Sri Lanka, Nepal and Pakistan are, no doubt, leading to different processes. Sri Lanka and Nepal have been dealing with land distribution quite differently from India and Bangladesh and in Sri Lanka at least, leftist governments pursued land reforms which transferred previously privately owned land under state control. All three countries have also been struggling with different problems which postponed far-reaching reforms towards a neoliberal agenda. With our initial focus on India and Bangladesh, we hope that the papers offered here can both stimulate further research and be used to make comparisons with other countries within the wider region of South Asia.

Conceptualising land loss and displacement in India and Bangladesh

- 6 Land loss, enclosures and dispossession have long been features of life in South Asia (Adnan 2013, Le Mons Walker 2008). Wherever land has been valued for its productive

potential, powerful elites have grabbed it from the less powerful via techniques such as money lending, intimidation, chicanery and explicit violence.³ State involvement is also nothing new. In post-colonial India the Raj appropriated large tracts of land for industry and infrastructure in the name of national projects of modernity and development (Levien 2013). Similarly in Bangladesh the government, often with the financial backing of international donors, has expropriated land for the building of bridges, roads and factories since its birth in 1971. Meanwhile, foreign companies have long taken over forest lands for plantations: witness the tea gardens of Northeast Bangladesh, some of which were owned by the British company Finlays and supported by British aid into the 1990s (Gardner 1997). Yet whilst the history is deep rooted, recent decades have involved a shift in the scale and nature of dispossession (Feldman and Geisler 2012; Adnan 2015: 28). In this context Levien's concept of 'regimes of dispossession' is useful. He defines this as:

..socially and historically specific constellations of state structures, economic logics tied to particular class interests and ideological justifications that generate a consistent pattern of dispossession' (2013: 383).

- 7 Levien's stress on ideological justification and its link to the extent and success of resistance is of particular relevance to us. In the post-Independence Nehruvian era of state owned industry the loss of land to steel plants and townships was justified by nationalist projects of modernity and development; steel plants were to be 'temples' to India's industrial, secular future, making 'backward' areas of forestry or 'tribals' a thing of the past (Levien 2013: 385). Levien suggests that the persuasive power of this vision, plus the large scale employment offered by the new industries, meant that resistance to land loss was muted and failed to gain widespread support. In contrast, in the current neoliberal regime of dispossession, which involves acquiring land for SEZs that fail to provide meaningful employment for the rural population and a state that has become a 'gate-keeper' for foreign investors, land grabs can only be justified by references to 'economic growth'; resistance is thus protracted and more often successful than in the past (Levien 2013).
- 8 The historical specificity of Levien's 'regimes of dispossession' builds in helpful ways upon David Harvey's notion of 'accumulation by dispossession' (or ABD) which has been used by many scholars seeking to analyse contemporary processes of land grab and dispossession.⁴ Arguing that capitalism's chronic problem of over-accumulation is solved by 'spatio-temporal fixes' in which new markets are opened up or resources exploited, the concept helps us understand new forms of capitalism in terms of space and territorialisation (Harvey 2003, 2004). Explored in detail in Adnan's paper in this volume, 'ABD' is a useful starting point in understanding the processes by which dispossession takes place in South Asia. Empirically the concept raises more questions than it answers and besides alerting us to the involvement of the state tells us very little about the actual techniques, alliances and ideological apparatus involved. Indeed, as Levien argues, Harvey fails to clearly distinguish ADB from primitive accumulation and is vague about the degree to which it is an economic or extra economic process, involving coercion other than market forces alone (Levien 2011a: 457). Combined with this, as Hall has pointed out, the term blunts our attention to specific histories and socio-political relationships (Hall 2011, 2012, 2013). For example, little attention is paid in Harvey's work to the relations of property and land use that existed *before* ABD. It is also assumed that people wish to continue to work the land when the reality in South / South-East Asia is often to the

contrary (Hall 2011, 2012, 2013, Li 2014). In a similar vein is the tendency to assume that locals / peasants / indigenous people / farmers, *etc.*, are united in resistance when the truth is more messy: local elites who stand to profit may comply with corporations, even carrying out violence against those who resist, and forming a new rentier class (Welker 2009, Levien 2011a, Gardner 2012). Quite often, poor people act out violence against others on behalf of their patrons. Such loyalty can derive from affiliation to a political party but also from ethnic belonging.

- 9 What then, are we describing and how are we to capture the local and historical specificities? Before we proceed it might help to distinguish conceptually between four terms that are often used interchangeably: land grab; enclosures; dispossession and displacement. The first, *land grab* is defined by Zoomers as 'large scale, cross border land deals or transactions that are carried out by transnational corporations or initiated by foreign governments' (Zoomers 2010: 249). Most commentators describe these 'grabs'⁵ as involving agribusiness, responding to the needs of urban populations in wealthy nations for food and bio-fuels. As Borrás *et al.* put it: 'The phrase 'global land grab' has become a catch-all to describe and analyse the global explosion of large scale (trans)national commercial land transactions' (2011: 210; also Borrás and Franco 2012). Though not confined solely to food and bio-fuel, for conservation, tourism and 'hideaways' may also feature (Zoomers 2010),⁶ these transactions are a response to global food insecurity, leading to corporations and in some instances states, taking over large tracts of land in distant 'empty' places to provide food for export, sometimes even importing foreign labour to do the agricultural work (Borrás *et al.* 2011, Zoomers 2010, Makki & Geisler 2011). Overall, the global loss of land from small holders to large scale business concerns is proceeding at an alarming rate, a 'frenzy' of large scale land acquisitions on a 'colossal' scale (Makki 2014).
- 10 Whilst Zoomers (2010) stresses the 'foreignisation of space' as a key component of contemporary land grabs, the commercialisation of agriculture can also take place within national borders (Hall 2013). The large scale privatisation of land and / or common water resources for prawn and shrimp farming destined for export to far-flung markets including the US and China by private Bangladeshi companies is just one case (see, for example, Ito 2002, Guhathakurta 2008). Meanwhile, others have suggested that current land grabs of 'undeveloped' territory can be thought of as the globalisation of *enclosures* (Makki 2014). It is worth noting that this term is usually used in the context of land that was originally held commonly, and as such cannot be accurately used to describe all the processes described in this volume. Historically the term refers to the process whereby common land in England was enclosed under acts of parliament, particularly from the 18th to the mid-19th century. This resulted in approximately 6.8 million acres of land being enclosed, with fences and hedges, from 1604–1914, forcing large numbers of small holders and peasant farmers off the land. The Enclosures were a major cause of the demise of peasant farming and the creation of an urban proletariat supplying labour for the Industrial Revolution. Crucially, the transformation of common land into private property involved its commoditisation and integration into market relations. Though this history might be understood in terms of the incursion of capitalism into the English countryside, it should not be 'naturalised' as solely economic. Rather, the process was primarily political, involving acts of parliament, peasant resistance and violent coercion, or as E. P. Thompson classically put it, 'a plain enough case of class robbery' (Thompson 1963). Meanwhile, colonialism involved the forced enclosure of land abroad. Historians

have argued that, like slavery, the enclosures of colonised common lands, either directly into plantations or indirectly via colonial taxes, augmented and funded enclosures and industrialisation at home (Makki 2014).

- 11 Perhaps it is already clear that any attempt to narrow the definition of either 'land grab' or 'enclosures' is doomed to failure. Examples from South Asia show that land grab cannot be described as the 'foreignisation of land', since national companies and states are often involved, whilst confining 'land grab' to expropriations made for the purposes of agribusiness and bio fuel excludes the vast tracts of land lost to industry, housing and property speculation. And whilst the term 'enclosures' reminds us of the historical antecedents of current processes, it occludes transfers in which land is already privatised and enclosed, as, for example, in the case of Bibiyana in Northeast Bangladesh described in Ahasan and Gardner's paper, or Singur-Nandigram in West Bengal, described by Das.
- 12 An important reason why we should be cautious in using the term 'land grab' is its temporal association. The imagery is explicit: land is suddenly and violently seized. Yet as several of our papers show, the transfer of land from one group of users to another is often incremental, shifting over time according to complex political processes literally on the ground. This is illustrated in this volume by Axelby's paper on how access to and rights over grazing land by different ethnic groups in Himachal Pradesh are negotiated over the years and are affected by national political events.
- 13 Finally, we need to distinguish between those who use and those who own resources (Ribot and Peluso 2003), a distinction that the term 'land grab' is in danger of blurring. For example, changes in land ownership might be agreed upon by owners if not users, as was the case in Bibiyana, Bangladesh, where UK-based owners of land agreed to sell when the levels of state compensation were raised (see Ahasan & Gardner in this volume; also Gardner 2012). As this latter case shows, whilst violence might lurk in the background, the actual process in which fields are transferred from one group of users (the rural poor) to another (the multinational Chevron) is legal and orderly; here, the term 'land grab' clouds the actual techniques used and the complexities of local responses.
- 14 Similar problems face the term '*dispossession*'. Like *land grab*, '*dispossession*' carries an emotional and political punch, but at times can be analytically fuzzy, obscuring rather than illuminating. To be dispossessed implies original possession. Yet as many of the cases discussed in this volume demonstrate, those who use land may not have legal tenure. Indeed, as Shelley Feldman shows, Hindus in Bangladesh have been constitutionally dispossessed since Partition. Again, we are cautioned to distinguish between legal property rights and access to resources, or as Axelby explains in his paper, 'that which (people) are able to derive benefit from' (this volume). Thus, as Nuremowla elaborates in his paper on the Phulbari case, even though they have cleared *khas* (government) land from forest, the farmers of Borogram have no papers and thus face little chance of gaining compensation if open-cast mining at Phulbari goes ahead. And whilst in the case of the commons, be this grazing land or wetlands used for fishing or *khas* land, the expropriation involves a traumatic and violently experienced loss of customary rights of access and can indeed be understood as a form of *dispossession*, in other cases the politics and socio-economic relationships are more complex.
- 15 To illustrate this, let us consider two cases from Bangladesh. In the first, what we might think of as 'classic' displacement and dispossession has taken place over many years in the Chittagong Hill Tracts, where large parts of the indigenous population have faced displacement in various phases. In the 1960s, a huge area was swallowed by a dam

construction project; from the 1970s onwards, the government distributed the land used by the local population for shifting cultivation—considered 'empty land', among immigrating settlers. Although the armed conflict in the area was officially pacified in 1997, the military continues to expropriate land, allegedly for security reasons and for business purposes (Adnan & Dastidar 2011, Gerharz 2015). Meanwhile, in other cases the processes are less straightforward, as for example in the Bibiyana gas field where the rural poor employed by transnational owners as labourers or sharecroppers on the land that was forcibly acquired had no say in the process and were not compensated. Whilst the gas field undoubtedly made their agrarian livelihoods even more precarious, to label them 'dispossessed' by the gas field is incorrect since they were never the owners of the land. Rather, they had been forced out of agriculture by wider processes which were taking place long before the gas field was constructed, in which agriculture was becoming increasingly commoditised and precarious (Gardner 2012). In this context, Misra's distinction between large-scale involuntary and sudden dispossession, caused by land grab for industry or mining and 'dispossession in slow motion,' is helpful (Mishra 2011: 3). Citing the case of Orissa, Misra argues that both forms work in tandem to create capitalist accumulation at the expense of the rural poor. Whilst the state's policy of encouraging large scale foreign investment for mining has led to substantial resistance, dispossession in slow motion, a quieter and often hidden process, has involved 'voluntary' transfers of land over longer time periods in which the pincer movements of rising production costs, indebtedness, and neoliberal policy have led to agrarian crisis and the longer term movement of the rural poor from their land.

- 16 Here it is useful to consider our final term '*displacement*'. Arising largely from a literature that focusses upon the large scale movements and resettlement of communities to make way for development infrastructure, mining or conservation projects (*cf.* Parasuraman 1999, Cernea 2006, Agrawal & Redford 2009, Mathur 2008), the term turns our attention from questions of property and possession to emplacement: the social as well as economic forces that structure relationships to localities and livelihoods, and indeed the costs of forced movement. This is illustrated in Nuremowla's paper. Threatened by Asia Energy's proposed mine in Phulbari, people in the village of Borogram are faced not only with the loss of land but also in hard won social capital, established over the years they have spent forming relationships within their village. For them, 'displacement' means not only the loss of land but vitally important social protection. Again, however, the term is in danger of being used too generally, and thus of concealing important differences in the processes involved. Feldman and Geisler make a useful distinction between in-situ and ex-situ displacement (Feldman & Geisler 2012). Defining *in-situ displacement* as 'the critical impairment of the means of social reproduction,' the authors argue that in-situ displacements, which are often invisible because they don't involve people leaving their homes, are no less catastrophic than ex-situ displacements, yet are also caused by the processes of capital accumulation. In the hinterlands of Dhaka, for example, pollution and illegal building, the filling up of wetlands and threatened as well as actual violence all contribute to people losing access to land and livelihoods, even if they don't actually lose their homes. Here too we should distinguish between forced displacements, caused directly by the state (for example, to make way for a mine, as threatened in Phulbari) or other agencies (for example, local mafia or *mustaan* who attack Hindu homes, causing them to flee in Bangladesh) and displacements which take place as a corollary of wider processes, such as the urbanisation and commodification of land described by Feldman

and Geisler (2012), or the long-term market processes that have led to a gradual erosion of agrarian livelihoods over much of South Asia.

- 17 By scoping out the different meanings of *land grab*, *enclosures*, *dispossession* and *displacement*, our purpose is to strike a note of caution about the interchangeable or fuzzy use of terms, whilst at the same time revealing their analytic and political potential. Whilst some of the papers that follow describe land grab and violent dispossession and others show more subtle, or hidden processes, all indicate the complex local politics and meanings that surround the use of and access to land. As other work implies, people are also not always opposed to the loss of farm land, the privatisation of the commons or the incursion of the market into the rural economy.⁷ We therefore cannot make assumptions about the nature of resistance to land loss. In Das' paper, for example, we see how opposition against the proposed TATA car plant in West Bengal arose partly from the manipulation of grass roots political cadres and party politics and not simply from a blanket opposition to the proposed development. Had levels of compensation been higher and the negotiations carried out in a more inclusive style, many farmers would have sold their land. Clearly, the potential gains of industrial development can be highly persuasive. In the development of the Mahindra World City in Jaipur, Levien shows how by allowing local farmers to retain 25 per cent of their expropriated land as developed plots, with the potential for substantial profit, the state was able to divide and mute resistance to the forced acquisition (Levien 2011a). Whilst tempting farmers with 'get rich quick' sweeteners is one way to hedge off potential resistance, in other cases persuasion is as much discursive as material, for as Jamie Cross has astutely pointed out, hopes and aspirations for development and modernity are often evoked at the sites of would be SEZs or other forms of industrialisation in India (Cross 2014). Let us turn to the discursive formations used in the appropriation of land.

Discursive formations

- 18 What is the role of discourse and ideology in justifying and enabling land grabs and dispossession? As Foucault has shown us, power emerges in discourses that arise from particular historically-constituted political economies. These 'architectures of knowledge' frame the world in taken-for-granted ways, leading to 'regimes of truth' that appear unquestionable. Power is dispersed and flowing, rather than being merely repressive: 'In fact power produces; it produces reality; it produces domains of objects and rituals of truth' (Foucault 1991: 194). 'Development' is a prime example of a 'regime of truth' which frames the world in particular ways, working to uphold the power of the North over the South. As Makki shows in his discussion of enclosures in Ethiopia, for example, the predatory land grabs of colonialism were historically justified by the notion of *terra nullius*, in which distant places were presented in terms of empty wilderness, their primitive nature in need of 'capitalist redemption and valorisation' (Makki 2014: 82). Indeed, in the post-colonial era, deconstructionist scholars such as Escobar have argued that the notion of development arose from the need for the North to continue to control the Global South via a discourse which constructed the ex-colonies in terms of technical problems and need (Escobar 1995; see also Ferguson 1990).⁸ More recently, work such as Emily Yeh's ethnography of Chinese development projects in Tibet have shown how 'gifts of development' allow for state territorialisation, evoking ambiguity amongst the supposed beneficiaries (Yeh 2013).

- 19 The Tibetan case hints at a second discursive strand used by states to justify their incursions into new territories: 'security'. Here we come to a paradox within the neoliberal era: the retreat of the welfare state and the deterioration of borders that hold people, ideas, finance and weapons at bay contribute to the production of (imagined) insecurity. Neoliberalism thus leads to a greater need for security, which in turn is masked as 'development' or programmes to win 'hearts and minds.' This tendency to disguise security concerns as development has become a dominant tool for controlling unstable regions in contemporary India. Duncan McDuie-Ra's analysis of the North Eastern Region Vision 2020 released by the Government in 2008 shows that although the official aim of this policy agenda is to achieve peace and prosperity in India's North East, it primarily aims at consolidating India's hegemonic position in the region (McDuie-Ra 2009). Similar developments can be observed in post-conflict Sri Lanka, where reconstruction measures in the war-torn region have been explicitly related to counter-insurgency and enduring militarisation (Goodhand 2010, Höglund & Orjuela 2011). Meanwhile, in the case of Jharkand discussed by Sareen in this volume, 'development for security' is used by the state to justify large-scale road-building projects that seem destined for mining operations rather than the anti-poverty projects of the Sarenda Action plan. Whether we interpret the Sarenda Action Plan as a deliberate and explicit element of the 'Ideological State Apparatus,' or as a less-conscious discourse which brings the unintended (though for the state and corporate interests desirable) consequences of infrastructure and accountable local populations, is a matter of theoretical orientation.
- 20 Whilst development may be understood as a crucial component of the 'regime of truth' that justified colonisation, what distinguishes the current era is its use by corporations. A growing body of ethnographic work focusses upon the so-called 'corporate social responsibility' (CSR) of extractive industries, often offered as an appeasing gift to populations in the areas where the extraction of resources takes place (Rajak 2011, Welker 2012, 2014, Frynas 2005, Kapelus 2002). As this demonstrates, extractive industries are keen to show a 'smiling face' (Shever 2010) by offering a range of development gifts which attempt to rebrand the corporation as compassionate, caring, in partnership with 'local communities' (Zilak 2004, Rajak, 2009, 2011) or manipulating the discourses of environmentalism with which they are critiqued to suggest that their work is sustainable and that they are protecting the environment and contributing to local culture (Welker 2009, Kirsch 2014, Rogers 2012).
- 21 A striking aspect of many of the CSR programmes of extractive industries is the use of NGOs to carry out their programmes, often in alliance with the local elite, who may also be acting as contractors or brokers for the company.⁹ In other cases, mining companies use NGO programmes to keep elites 'on side' by offering them leadership roles in the dispensation of development goods, whilst attempting to procure the NGO's good reputation. In Ahasan and Gardner's paper in this volume, two examples from Bangladesh are discussed which show how in order to gain the 'social license to operate,' corporations plug into discourses of development which present land loss and the extraction of resources as necessary for national growth and development, whilst offering development gifts that will supposedly benefit the community. In an interesting echo of *terra nullis*, in Bibiyana, Chevron's CSR executives were keen to stress that before their arrival 'there was nothing there' in the way of NGO projects (Gardner 2012), whilst in Dumki, Sylhet, the JT Corporation set out an 'uplifting project' which would remedy the 'problem' of low productivity in the area.

- 22 Despite these efforts, the justifications used by corporations and states in the expropriations of land are not always accepted by local populations. Instead they are either vociferously contested (as in Phulbari, described in this volume by Nuremowla), ignored (as in the Dumki case, in which the corporation's plans were rejected by the NGO, described in this volume by Ahasan and Gardner) or they find partial acceptance, with some groups taking up the plans and their ideological justifications whilst others remain unconvinced (as in Bibiyana). In these cases, discourses of development fail to convince, or clash with alternative understandings of what development should be (Gardner 2012). Issues of scale are important too: for whom is the justification made? For local populations in order to gain compliance, or for national and global audiences and shareholders, in which case reputation is all?
- 23 If the discourses of development—and agents in the guise of NGOs—are increasingly being used by corporations rather than states to justify land appropriation, questions are raised concerning the relationship between states and corporations. Is it the case, for example, that in the neoliberal era states have become 'shadow states' (Harriss-White 2003), mere land brokers for private interests? Let us turn to the varied forms of state-corporate coalitions in Bangladesh and India.

The 'neoliberal' state and its corporate coalitions

- 24 As our discussion so far implies, neoliberalism does not simply lead to the retreat of the state. Instead, recent tendencies towards trans-nationalisation and privatisation transform the state and the particular ways in which governance is performed (Randeria 2003, Ferguson 2004, Gupta & Sharma 2006, Sharma & Gupta 2006). In this context we can understand the institutions of states as part of an intricate constellation of actors, including NGOs, schools, communities and companies located at and acting across different spatial scales. In some cases, states may strategise in particular ways in their responses to global forces for justice or development. Based on her empirical inquiry into environmental justice in India, for example, Shalini Randeria has pointed out that states may become 'cunning states, which capitalise on their perceived weaknesses in order to render themselves unaccountable' (Randeria 2003: 306). But the contributions to this volume also reveal how we need to conceptualise the state as 'a multi-layered, contradictory, translocal ensemble of institutions, practices and people' (Sharma & Gupta 2006: 6) in order to understand the ways in which it regulates the access to and loss of land. In Sareen's contribution, for example, the military renders 'stateness' visible in people's everyday lives, while in Das' paper, the political party takes over the functions of the local state.
- 25 Acknowledging that neoliberal reforms in India in the early 1990s mark a significant turning point, scholars have embarked on the use of concepts inspired by governmentality studies to figure out the ways in which neoliberalism leads to the carving out of exceptional spaces (Ong 2006) and the role of states in this (Le Mons Walker 2009, Baka 2013, Münster & Strümpell 2014, Adnan 2015). As we have implied, whereas earlier initiatives were regarded as initiated by the state and for the development of the entire nation, legitimised with the notion of 'public purpose' (Mehta 2009: xxxii), the involvement of, if not exclusive role played by, corporate actors has provoked a shift in perspective. In considering these processes let us briefly outline some

differences between Bangladesh and India, a task taken further in Adnan's article in this volume.

- 26 In India, neoliberal reforms were unleashed in 1991, when the government abruptly dismantled the so-called 'License Raj system', *e.g.* tight regulations for the establishment of businesses. The measure was a clear break with previous policies based on the ideals of a planned economy. Massive programmes of privatisation and structural adjustment followed (Le Mons Walker 2009: 559, Adnan 2015: 27). Whereas the drastic deregulation fostered rapid economic growth at the macro-level, the measures also went along with land grab at a large scale.
- 27 Meanwhile, in Bangladesh, the development of an export-oriented economy concentrating on the textile industry has led to a major source of income (Kabeer 2002, Dannecker 2002). It has been widely agreed that the garment boom in the 1980s ushered in the era of neoliberalism in Bangladesh, with comprehensive economic restructuring and transformations of urban spaces, as well as the agrarian sector: Feldman and Geisler argue that the transition in export production from agricultural commodities to manufacturing goods displaced agriculture as a central focus of investment (Feldman & Geisler 2012: 982). Similarly in India, financial liberalisation led to a decline in institutional credit for agriculture and provoked an agrarian crisis, which led not only to growing incidences of starvation and farmer suicides, but also the loss of land due to growing rural indebtedness after state subsidies were removed (Le Mons Walker 2008: 572). In both Bangladesh and India, the state and also the state governments promulgated laws and policies that facilitated corporate access to land and natural resources (Adnan 2015: 29). Meanwhile, rights and entitlements of vulnerable groups were denied, for example by dismantling constitutional provisions and laws protecting the rights of indigenous populations (Baviskar 1995, Khagram 2004, Ghosh 2006). In both countries, the displacement of indigenous populations has led to the formation of social movements which capitalise on the recent institutionalisation of indigenous people's rights and discourses at international levels, but which the state has been remarkably resilient to. In Bangladesh for example, the state resisted the activists' demands to implement the Peace Accord in the Chittagong Hill Tracts and despite massive international pressure continued to transfer power to the military (Gerharz 2014).
- 28 In India, the formation of SEZs has been a major aspect of state attempts to attract foreign investors since 2000. SEZs have been considered as a 'systematic framework for land grabs' (Adnan 2015: 28), and not surprisingly have involved substantial resistance, often over inappropriate levels of compensation (Costa 2007). In Bangladesh, SEZs have been established since the 1980s, when Ershad implemented structural adjustments programmes to counter the negative effects of nationalising all major industries after independence. In contrast to India, however, the establishments of SEZ's and the textile sector in Bangladesh have met with little resistance, partly because of the generation of employment opportunities, especially in the textile industry which grew rapidly in the early 1980s and has not only turned into a major national source of income but has also generated a large number of jobs, primarily for women (Dannecker 2002). This garment boom took place in a period of intensive nation-building and served as the 'natural reward for successful national integration' (Ferguson 2004: 387).
- 29 Ironically, the Bangladeshi experience shows that whilst nation-building may be the characteristic rhetoric of the state, it does not necessarily lead to a strong state. In her work on micro-finance schemes of NGOs, Lamia Karim observes that in postcolonial

countries where 'the notion of citizenship as a set of entitlements that are bound up with a nation-state that guarantees those rights, is lacking' (Karim 2008: 6), populations are served by non-state actors instead. Thus the country is characterised by an extremely high number of NGOs who govern the poor population in rural areas. This has led to the accusations that NGOs operate as a 'shadow state' (Karim 2011). It is in this context that corporations seeking a 'social license to operate' attempt to forge relationships with NGOs as well as states, as shown by Ahasan and Gardner's paper in this volume.

- 30 Both the Bangladeshi and Indian examples show that neoliberalism does not lead to the replacement of the state by market forces or corporations, but 'works by multiplying sites for regulation and domination through the creation of autonomous entities of government that are not [necessarily] part of the formal state apparatus' (Gupta & Sharma 2006: 277). From this it is important to investigate the particular ways that governments and other actors govern access to land. Here again, the relationships and outcomes involved are complex. In this volume, Das' paper shows how the Government of West Bengal, dominated by the Communist Party of India, Marxist (CPIM), turned into the land broker for Tata Motors Ltd in Singur in 2006. Das elucidates how the 'alternative bureaucracy' owned and controlled by the CPIM took over the tasks of the state institutions and how local responses were mediated and intricately linked to party politics at the grassroots level.
- 31 Whilst in Singur farmers resisting TATA's development were ultimately successful, the process involved significant violence. As this implies, whilst discourses of development and security may be central to contemporary land appropriations in South Asia, and justifications of 'uplift' and 'empowerment', plus alliances with reputable NGOs, used to present a 'smiling face' by corporations, this is shadowed by a more traditional method: violence. Let us turn to the ways this is used by states and private interests to appropriate land in the neoliberal era. This introduces another crucial player: the military.

Security, violence, and the military

- 32 Clearly, the relationships between state, society and the market are complex. One thing which all the papers in the volume have in common, however, is the way in which land appropriations take recourse in either 'legality' or violence (or, in many cases, both). In this section we see how whilst discursive formations of development, modernity and security are habitually used in the appropriation of land, legal measures, often underpinned by the threat of violence, are a tried and tested back up. In this context, the role of the military is of great importance.
- 33 Feldman's account in this volume of the Vested Property Act as a means to expropriate members of the Hindu minority in Bangladesh shows how the state is directly responsible for the loss of land amongst Hindus. The effect has been the ongoing migration of Bangladeshi Hindus in response to everyday insecurity and, more than often, violent expulsion. As Feldman's papers shows, the state justifies land appropriation in the name of national security against 'enemy' Hindus.
- 34 While ethnic belonging and nationalist exclusion are justifications for land grab by the state, neoliberal reforms have resulted in the restructuration of state institutions. Feldman and Geisler (2012: 982) argue that civilian and military elites were given greater voice in decision making to secure Ershad's security in Bangladesh during the 1980s, a

strategy which has proved to have remarkable continuity. As a consequence, elites have been successful in gaining control over government properties, with devastating consequences for water quality and the livelihoods of small farmers.

- 35 Whilst Feldman and Geisler (2012: 982) refer to a well-known phenomenon in contemporary Bangladesh—gangs hired by elite encroachers who use violence to appropriate land illegally—fear is not only produced by extra-legal actors; the involvement of the military also gives good reason for anticipating violence. Ahasan and Gardner's paper makes similar observations: whilst corporations stand back to allow land to be taken, in Bangladesh the state is likely to turn to violence, via the police and military. Meanwhile, in Phulbari and Singur, as documented by Nuremowla and Das, police violence at demonstrations led to deaths.
- 36 The actuality of potential violence resembles recent trends in other countries in the South Asian region and beyond. In Sri Lanka, for example, the militarisation of the territories 'liberated' from the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) in 2009 has become a salient feature. In India, the dangers of 'Islamic terrorism' plus Maoist and Naxalite movements are regarded as a major security threat, serving as a justification to increase the budget for the securitisation of borders and counter terrorist measures. Within this context, Sareen's paper addresses the security-development-nexus, a strategy employed by the Indian government to pacify unruly territories in Jharkand's West Singhbhum district.
- 37 How do those at the receiving end of this violence make sense of it, whether in the form of its potential or its actuality? In Nuremowla's paper we see how the anxieties produced by stories of the devastation caused by land appropriation can be read as a kind of violence in Phulbari. Faced with the loss not only of land but also community and the social protection it brings, people face an uncertain future. Many are prepared to use force to protect their interests, knowing that the state will respond with violence, for in previous years people have been killed by the police during protests. The ability and willingness to engage in protest varies. This raises important questions which remain beyond the scope of this volume but require further research: how is land loss and displacement experienced by different people? What are the prerequisites for engaging in resistance against the loss of land? Here, questions of gender, generation and ethnicity, but also education, cultural and social capital, are likely to be central.
- 38 To conclude, in the seven papers that follow we offer new empirical material and insights into the processes surrounding land loss and change of use in Bangladesh and India. Shapan Adnan's theoretical review develops a typology of the mechanisms of land alienation and identifies the diverse range of land appropriating mechanisms in Bangladesh and India. The complex ways in which different groups get access to land and how this shifts over time are analysed in Richard Axelby's article on grazing rights in Himachal Pradesh. Sadid Nuremowla's contribution shows that dispossession is not limited to the mere loss of farming land, but extends to existing social ties of the people living in the locality of a proposed open-cast mine at Phulbari, Bangladesh. Taking the case of Bangladesh's nationalist project as an example, Shelley Feldman's paper shows how the exclusion of Hindus has been enshrined by law. In Siddarth Sareen's paper, the actual practices by which governmental development interventions produce inequitable access to resources are analysed via empirical material on the Saranda Action Plan in Jharkhand, India. The last two papers deal with the involvement of multinational corporations and its consequences: Ritanjan Das shows the complexities emerging from

resistance to land dispossession by TATA at Singur, West Bengal, and the ways in which resistance and acquiescence coalesce with state politics, while Abu Ahasan and Katy Gardner reveal the steps taken by corporations in gaining access to resources, in particular their attempt to build alliances with NGOs as well as states and local elites in Bangladesh. Whilst being aware of the geographical limitations of the work, we hope that the questions raised will lead to further research in South Asia.

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NOTES

1. See Ito (2002) for work on prawn cultivation in Bangladesh.
 2. Though see older literature on land grab and peasant inequalities / violence in Bangladesh *e.g.* Bangladesh Rural Advancement Committee (1986), Hartman & Boyce (1983); more recently, see Feldman & Geisler (2012) and Adnan (2013).
 3. See Hartman & Boyce (1983).
 4. For a summary, see Münster & Strümpell (2014).
 5. Makki and Geisler point out that in the African context these transactions are often long term leases rather than sales, making the term a misnomer (2011: 2).
 6. See also Fairhead *et al.* (2012) on 'Green Grabbing'.
 7. See Li (2014) for an Indonesian example.
 8. For extended discussion and critique see Gardner & Lewis (2015), Ziai (2004).
 9. See Welker (2009) for an Indonesian example.
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ABSTRACTS

This introduction to the volume addresses some of the complexities surrounding land acquisition in contemporary Bangladesh and India. By interrogating four conceptual issues concerning current land expropriation, we seek to develop some common ground and to reveal important questions addressed in the articles and beyond. First, we discuss recent theoretical approaches to dispossession and land loss and secondly, the ideological apparatus of contemporary dispossessions—the discursive formations of 'development' and 'security'. Thirdly, by contrasting the historical trajectories of both countries, we also explore the coalitions between states, corporations and the military. Finally, we discuss the ways in which violence and security have played a changing role in displacement.

INDEX

Keywords: land expropriation, accumulation by dispossession, development discourse, neoliberal state

AUTHORS

KATY GARDNER

Professor of Anthropology and Head of Department, London School of Economics

EVA GERHARZ

Junior professor, Faculty of Social Sciences, Ruhr-University Bochum.