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(editorial note?)**

Making the political, and doing politics: Unfixed land in an Amoebal Zone in India

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India’s largest SEZ-- an Amoebal Zone-- has constantly changed shape, name, and purpose. The material, regulatory, cartographic, and classificatory flexibility of ‘unfixed land’ underlies these contortions. The multiplicity of land also informs political adversariality towards the Zone. Over 2.5 decades, a heterogeneous group of farmers, fishworkers, pastoralists, and local to global NGOs have contested the takeover of lands along registers of access, use, property, environmental sustainability, and more. This multiplicity is somewhat ordered through the coercions, mediations, and compromises of everyday and Party politics. Politics temporarily and imperfectly settles the making, distribution and use of unfixed land.

Keywords: land, multi-dimensionality, India, SEZ, politics, middlemen

Introduction

After India’s economy liberalised in 1991, land for private non-agricultural uses such as infrastructure, industry and real estate, rose by 5.6 million hectares (Government of India 2014). Land for food, forests and the commons declined. In this context, we have access to excellent research on transitions in India’s land involving state-led land acquisition for urbanisation, mining and infrastructure projects, the politics of land grabbing on a sub-national scale and resistance to this, the financialisation of land, the actors involved, etc. (Goldman 2011; Sami 2013; Nielsen, Bedi and Da Silva 2017; Levien 2018; Nielsen 2018 to name a few). In much of this literature, land remains largely uninterrogated. Researchers have tended to focus on the process of transition rather than land per se. Land, it can be assumed, is out there, the solid ground beneath our feet, which is undergoing change driven by human impetus. In analytical terms, this land is fixed and inelastic as textbooks tell us (Samuelson and Nordhaus 2010). It is the ‘solid’ and dry surface of the earth (Park and

Allaby 2017); it is 'fixed in place' (Hall 2013). Land is mobile capital's spatial fix (Harvey 2001), a 'thing' albeit a desired and valuable one in certain contexts (Li 2014).

Going past the axiom of fixity, this paper interrogates unfixed land. Section 1 shows land being discursively, materially, institutionally and heterogeneously made. With the premise that unfixed land co-produces fluid institutions, Section 2 explores the making of the political around unfixed land. Following Mouffe (1993, 2005) I study the political as an agonistic space where plurality and difference are adversarial. In other words, as land is unfixed and re-fixed for projects of infrastructure and industry, there emerge seemingly irreconcilable chasms in the visions and engagements of different stakeholders. At the same time, land's unfixity, and the making of the political around it, are not in a perpetual state of contestation. Section 3 shows the political in land somewhat settled through the order-making of P(p)olitics. This would be everyday politics with a small 'p' (Kerkvliet 2009), as also Party Politics. The unfixity of land brings together the analytical frames used in this paper. Unfixity and multiplicity are deployed in the language and strategies of the agonistic political. This unfixity is subsequently sought to be fixed and ordered via the manoeuvrings of P(p)olitics. By order I mean systematisations based on regularities (Foucault 1966/2002; Graeber 2015). That land continues transcending the bounds of order and fixity set for it by capitalist commodification forms the concluding note of the paper.

To enable in-depth exploration, the paper focuses on one case. The Gujarat SEZ has been touted as the largest private Special Economic Zone¹ in India. At one point, the SEZ was expected to cover 32,000 hectares², encompassing the coast, commons, pasture and agrarian lands of four villages and abutting several other settlements by the Arabian Sea. The latter include a town of 20,000 people, and over ten villages with populations ranging from 1000 to 12,000 people. These settlements are implicated in Zonal activities due to a proliferation of manufacturing and service facilities in the area after the advent of the Zone. For instance, a Ductile Pipe manufacturing factory I have studied lies in a village outside the SEZ. However, its production capacity of 500,000 Metric Tonnes a year is geared towards export via the Zone.

¹ SEZs are trade and manufacturing capacity development tools, defined by policy incentives aimed at encouraging foreign direct investment (FDI), technology innovations and exports. SEZs, whether they are single or multi-product, tend to cover vast areas and have thus proved controversial for their use of resources, including land and water, to the detriment of local populations.

² SEZ executives, interviewed on 22/12/2008

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5 Interestingly the size, purpose and even name of the ‘SEZ’ is a moving target, much like the
6 land on which it is built. The project began life as a proposed salt manufacturing unit in 1992,
7 spread over 1214 hectares. It expanded to include an export jetty, ports and manufacturing
8 areas classified as a Waterfront Development Project and SEZ. It went on to host energy
9 generation units including an Ultra Mega Power Plant (UMPP). After the global recession of
10 2008, the export-oriented SEZ was whittled down. The focus of the site shifted to
11 manufacturing for the domestic market, a ship-breaking yard, a proposed copper refinery, and
12 renewable energy production. We are witnessing not an SEZ, but a hydra-like Amoebal Zone
13 (AZ, or Zone), descriptively speaking.
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22 Ranged against the Zone from Day 1 are farmers, salt pan labour and manufacturers,
23 fishworkers, pastoralists, and a variety of local to global NGOs. Over 2.5 decades, they have
24 deployed direct protest, appeals to the state and adjudicating bodies, repeated legal
25 challenges, and partnerships with environmental and human rights organisations. The
26 Opponents are not fighting the takeover of their land, but lands. In fact, their legal and
27 regulatory challenges to the Zone consistently critique the fixed, self-serving projection of
28 land for the Zone as underutilised waste. A brief appraisal of the vast site of study
29 contextualises the latter arguments.
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38 The coast that the Zone dominates today has been at the centre of trade with East Africa,
39 West Asia and beyond for centuries (Simpson 2006; Saxena 2014). Seafaring is also linked to
40 a thriving fishing economy. In 1997-98, when the Zone started expanding, government
41 estimates pegged the local fishworking population at 3979 (Mackinnon 2015). Maritime and
42 fishing occupations are largely practised by Muslims in an environment in which dominant,
43 upper caste Hindus look down on *jeev hatya*³ (animal killing, see Ghassem-Fachandi 2012).
44 My research sites also host pastoral and agrarian economies. The dry deciduous and grassy
45 terrain of the area is well suited to hardy indigenous buffalo and camels which are kept for
46 milk and transport. The camels of the area are of the local *kharai* breed, which can swim and
47 feed on the mangroves along the coast. Largely Adivasi (indigenous-tribal) and Hindu lower
48 caste herders practice an itinerant lifestyle. Fishworkers too live on the coastal commons nine
49 months of the year, and migrate to villages inland during the monsoons.
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³ Activist, interview, 21/12/2008, near the Zone

The Zone and its proponents may choose to unsee the lower status, and the mobile, as also their connections to the land. However, the Zone has to contend with upper and middle caste farmers who dominate the villages that are within the Zonal ambit. The latter grow rain-fed wheat, coarse grain, vegetables and hardy fruit such as *chikoo* (sapota). The average farm size is 2 hectares. However, village elites from the Rajput castes own farms ranging from 2-10 hectares, which are classified as ‘medium’ holdings in government books. Those who labour on the fields include lower castes and Dalits (ritually ‘untouchable’ castes), who also service the village economy, say via leather processing and weaving. They may additionally work in the salt pans that dot the coast, though ownership tends to lie with urban businessmen who reside in the district (sub sub-national) capital or further afield. More educated, younger generations from various social groups have been absorbed into office work, petty retail and urban occupations (also Patel 2016). Clearly, the land that the Zone seeks to command is vast and complex. This land is not simply out there, waiting for Zonal takeover.

In terms of method, the paper is based on long-term qualitative research. I have studied the politics of land in Gujarat since 2003. Field research that informs this project was conducted in the state capital Gandhinagar, the commercial capital Ahmedabad, and the site of the AZ in 2003-04, 2008 and 2015. Fieldwork involved observation at key sites, and in-depth interviews with stakeholders such as Zone officials, government functionaries, activists, journalists, land and livelihood losers, local politicians, brokers and residents of the sites incorporating and adjacent to the Zone. In addition to interviews which number around 50, the research draws on a month’s immersive research in village Lahiyaria bordering the Zone. This involved living in the village in the house of a land broker, and interacting with his milieu of local politicians and officials, land buyers and sellers, commons users and losers, Zone employees and aspirants, migrant labour, etc. A detailed field diary emerged from this period of research, along with interview notes. Finally, the paper benefits from documentary sources such as government reports and policy announcements, legal papers from challenges to the Zone, NGO reports, and newspaper articles in Gujarati and English. Documentary sources have been followed till the time of writing. Follow-up Skype interviews were also conducted with activists in late 2018 and mid-2019. All locations and interviewees have pseudonymous names for protecting their identity.

1. Unfixed land

Land could do with more attention in the literature on land grab, but it has been studied innovatively across the social sciences over time (Marx 1887/1967; Weber 1922/1978; Polanyi 1944). Polanyi (1944) presciently pointed to the fictitious nature of land as a commodity. Land is not readily available for sale and purchase; one plot of land is not easily interchangeable with another. Land has to be taken to market (Nevins and Peluso 2008); it is commodified via human action. Lefebvre (1991) adds to the critique by pointing to land's many dimensions. For him, land is agriculture, property, and territory; it is economics and politics. Along these lines, Hall (2013) examines land as territory, property and an object of regulation. Li (2014) too suggests that the uses and meanings of land are not stable; they can be disputed. The value of land is not intrinsic. It is a flexible assemblage of material substances, technologies, discourses, practices, policies, politics and power. Rasmussen and Lund (2018) discuss processes of reterritorialisation under expanding capitalism. The reterritorialisation of resource control reconfigures what the authors call frontier spaces. Here, existing patterns of spatial control, authority and institutional orders are fundamentally challenged and replaced by new uses and users of resources.

My understanding furthers research that views land as processual and multi-dimensional. Insights from the field have shaped my perspective in conversation with extant literature. I first visited the Zone in December 2008. As I stood on site, I realised the transformation I was witnessing was not of land but lands, as also water and air. There were mangroves that grow in brackish water giving way to a mechanised harbour; the sea was being dredged into solid, commercial space. Creeks were being filled and sand dunes flattened. The miracle of the Zone was not the construction of world class infrastructure, as the private developer of the project suggests in promotional material. What was miraculous was the construction of land itself. Soon enough I was also confronted with this land's myriad conceptualisations. I was sitting with a fishworker, Ali, one day. Ali's community has much less access to the coast after the Zone's entry. If patches of coast are available to them, fish catch has depleted due to construction, release of factory effluents, and the movement of large ships. Ali was stoic about the frenzied activity around him. '*Ben, jyaare aa kai na hato, ame hata...* Sister, when none of this existed, we were here. We were fishing and grazing.'⁴ After meeting Ali, I stood by the sea within the Zone, talking to a senior manager. Pointing to the expanse, he said 'this is all wasteland. We have invested a lot... to make it usable. See what we have built out

⁴ Interview, 21/12/2008, near the Zone

of nothing. This is all the vision of [the proprietor] and a very good team. *Pehle to yahan kuch hi nahin tha* [earlier, there was nothing here].⁵

As the testimonies from Ali and the manager make clear, humans relate to land, and categorise it in myriad ways. This land varies over time; it varies in meaning; and it changes materially. Field research, followed by iteration with existing conceptualisations, lead me to propose the following dimensions relevant to my research sites: enlivened land, land as territory, land that is governed, including via property, and land as access and exclusion. To elaborate, Land is infused with history and memory (Ulloa 2005; Alexander 2006). Humans revere it as a provider, mother, a store of identity and belonging (Munster 2017). In my field sites, people regularly seek divine forgiveness by touching the soil and then their forehead, before stamping on the ground. In all these cases, instead of the land possessing agency per se, divinity, sociality and memory are invoked in the land via human action. Humans enliven land. We entangle it with our sociality, lending it a social life (Appadurai 1986), or socialised trajectory. This life, and meaning-making of land, is further co-productively shaped by our institutions as demonstrated below.

As territory, land lends identity to the state. Territory is not a given (Agnew 1994). It is a political technology that is produced, mutable and fluid (Elden 2010). It comprises active techniques for measuring, ordering and mapping, as also legal and political mechanisms for controlling and producing landed terrain, and maintaining its boundaries (Elden 2009). The formal territorialising practices of the state are amply visible in my field sites. There is regular police patrolling near the Zone on account of 'terror alerts' and a heightened security situation in this area that borders Pakistan. Territory is also claimed and asserted within the boundaries of the state. It is social, economic and political dominance over space in the everyday (Benbabaali 2018). Thus in a process that enlivens as also territorialises land, the developers of the Zone have built a magnificent temple to the Hindu lord Hanuman, within the Zone. My informants proudly indicate that Hanuman is *pawan putra* [son of the wind god], he controls storms.⁶ Overlooking environmental caution, the Zone is built in a cyclone-prone area. The wind god is entreated to protect the Zone from the furies of nature. The cultural landscaping of the Zone also affirms the control of its new landowners over a potentially contentious territory, intermediated by the securitising state and the gods.

⁵ Interview, 22/12/2008

⁶ Interview, 22/12/08

Land as territory needs to be ordered and managed in the everyday. Here land is associated with authority, and becomes the means for deploying this authority. A key mechanism adopted by the state for controlling its territory is the governance of land. The latter is via regulating land policy, land use, and ownership. In turn, the state is shaped by its interventions in land. For instance, a state that proactively opens up land markets in its territory gets termed pro-business and attracts further investment (Sud 2014a). Not just the state, non-state actors also claim territory. Non-state actors deploy their authority in territorialised space. They may derive influence through proximity to the state, and may be categorised as being in the shadows of the state (Harriss-White 2003; Das and Poole 2004).

Besides being enlivened, territory and governed authority, land is property: the legal and implementable right to benefit from a tangible or intangible resource (Lund 2011). The state adjudicates ownership rights over land through the creation of property, in turn taxing property holders in an enduring relationship. The state's property laws gain power by appearing as rational abstractions (Mitchell 2002; Blomley 2014). In practice, these abstractions are fought over, as I show shortly. Moving away from the dominance of property, Ribot and Peluso (2003) see land through the frame of access. Access is not the right but the ability—direct or indirect—to derive benefit from things. Access to land would depend on an evolving constellation of factors, including power, politics, social and economic resources, etc. This access could be expressed via the powers of possession (Sikor and Lund 2009).

The flip side of the ability to access and possess land, would be the capacity to exclude others from it. As Hall, Hirsch and Li (2011) tell us, the state, market, community and political actors may exercise such powers of exclusion. Demonstrating powers of access and exclusion over land is this quote from one of my interviewees in village Lahiyaria. JB is an ex-village Sarpanch (headman) and current political notable plus land broker. He says with swagger:

Whatever [property] title we can get on the land is good. And sometimes if there is very *seedha sadhaa* [straightforward] title, we can also spoil it. Power is in *kabza* [access via possession]. You don't sleep in the *khet* [field] do you? No, you don't. I will just send five men; they will go and sit in your *khet* at night. Next morning they will put [a] fence... Now will you want to fight me in court or just settle with money? If you go to court, you will be dead before anything comes out. *Litigation mein toh zindagi nikal jayegi* [your life will pass by in pursuing litigation]. If you take possession your position becomes strong... (Interviewed 12/8/2015)

Here, JB is asserting his authority over land. He derives this authority from the lingering influence of his official position in the village, and from his social standing. His position, and his skills as a land broker allow him to manipulate and move between land as property, as also land as access and exclusion.

In sum, land is variable materially, conceptually, and in use. In opposition to notions of solidity and fixity, I term this land as unfixed. Unfixed land may occupy multiple registers, being say, property, contested access and territory at the same time. Further, my field-based research evinces continuous movement of land across its many material, conceptual and use dimensions: unfixed land is transitional. Unfixed land may also be re-fixed, say with marshy land being appropriated for infrastructure, via the apportioning of property status. However as the latter half of this paper argues, the social (and political and economic) life of land would not end at this point. Movement, and cyclical unfixing and re-fixing, is inherent to land viewed through the analytical window of unfixity. It becomes particularly heightened in a country and economy where land is undergoing major transformation.

It would be pertinent to ask why it is necessary to bring this proliferating idea of land via the window of unfixity into conversations about resource use and resource transitions. That land is not-quite a commodity, or that it is multi-dimensional with varied meanings, is not a new concept. Scholars like Polanyi and Lefebvre put forward this perspective decades ago. Others, as the literature review has shown, have taken these ideas forward, or highlighted specific dimensions of land beyond its marketability as property. Despite the existence of these understandings across disciplines, it is clear that dominant discourses today, including on land grab, have looked past this literature. Here land is overwhelmingly a base for accumulation; it is a commodity or commodity-in-the-making. It is for this reason that even those who engage with Polanyi today feel that the fictitiousness of land as commodity is an anachronism. Much land has already been commodified (Christophers 2016). My paper is an appeal to read beyond this catchall. I make this plea not out of compulsion to go against the grain. I make it because my field sites are generating data where much else is woven into the story of land, alongside commodification. In fact, the narrative of the political that I examine below is built fundamentally around these many lives of land.

2. Land worth fighting for: Making the political in and around the Zone

Over time, the Amoebal Zone has brought more and more land into its ambit, making one of its disgruntled opponents suggest this is little other than ‘land grab’⁷. There is credence to this claim. We know that the kernel of the Zone was 1214 hectares of state-controlled, coastal commons leased by the Government of Gujarat. By 2008, when I visited the Zone, a promotional film I watched on site suggested the project was built over 13,000 hectares. A further 9000 hectares were part of the Company’s expansion plans, of which 5000 hectares were already in the possession of the Company. During interviews with Zone personnel, the figure of 32,000 and 32,300 hectares was bandied about⁸. Ten years later, the Developer’s promotional material discusses not a Special Economic Zone, but an Economic Hub. This comprises a compressed Special Economic Zone, a Domestic Tariff Area, and a Free Trade and Warehousing Zone, and is spread over 15,000 hectares. Some of the remaining land has been further leased or sold to other operations, including those manufacturing and providing services within and outside the Zone. A lot of the land is lying vacant, waiting for opportunities triggered by demand from national and international markets, and incentives and subsidies from the state to propel further contortions in and around the Zone. Even for someone observing the Zone-in-the-making closely, it is hard to pinpoint the exact amount of land it controls, and the various purposes to which it is being flexibly put. This amorphousness is central to the identity of the Zone. It also defines the political in opposition to it.

The land for the Amoebal Zone comes from a plethora of sources, for its plethora of uses. It has been transferred by the state from its kitty, which includes revenue land controlled by the state, and commons, waste and pastoral land used by various stakeholders but officially in the writ of the state. Coastal and forest land regulated by the state has also been made over to the project. This state-controlled land has been given to the Zone, sometimes for less than peanuts. As the former head of a Panchayat (Village Council) in a village adjacent to the Zone told me, some pastoral land has been transferred to the Zone for as little as 1.2 rupees per square meter⁹. In addition to government land, the Company developing the Zone has bought land from farmers and others in the area over many years and at varying prices¹⁰. Finally, the Company has benefited from state-led land acquisition. The patchwork, put-together, Amoebal Zone has constantly changed shape, name, and purpose. The material,

⁷ Activist, Skype interview, 13/11/2018

⁸ Executives, interviewed 22/12/2008

⁹ Interview, 12/8/2015

¹⁰ Interviews, farmers and land brokers adjacent to the Zone, August 2015

regulatory, cartographic, and classificatory flexibility of land underlies these contortions. This is an unfixed Zone on unfixed land.

That the Zone is a political space is already in evidence. What land is, who it belongs to, how it should be used, measured, governed, perceived, and apportioned is contestable. This state of being fought over makes land worth framing through an agonistic political lens. Mouffe (2005) tells us the political is agonistic: an adversarial space where plurality and difference are necessarily conflictual, and near impossible to reconcile. Here Schmittian (1963/2004) us-other, we-they distinctions are not ironed out by the triumph of one view. Difference exists, is expressed, and undergirds pluralism and democracy (Mouffe 2013). The ‘disruptive passions’ of the political tend to be expressed through sociality and identity. Democracies cannot avoid the existence of domination and violence. However they can establish institutions to limit and contest the effects of agonism. Legal institutions are one such domain (Mouffe 1993). Law may mediate, enable, constrain or curtail the agon (Schaap 2009). Agonistic politics may end up at odds with prevailing legal, social and political orders. But the confrontation of variable orders could expose the fundamental schisms of the political, and render conflict meaningful. Thus the outcome being sought by political agonism is not equality, or common ground between opposed parties. That condition may be impossible to achieve in unequal societies. Instead, the probability being fought for is the asymmetrical opening between established ways of doing, including doing law and politics, and aspired for ways of doing (Schaap 2009). The agonistic political around unfixed, multi-dimensional land in the Zone centres on such practices of emerging dominant order, and the possibility of challenging it.

The Zone dominates the landscape it occupies. Its presence is stamped onto territorial geography, with officially sanctioned kilometre markings welcoming people to ‘The Zone’ rather than to its host region which predates the Zone by centuries. The state and the Zone are spoken about in one breath by observers and those who have lost land to the project. There is little doubt in anybody’s mind that the Zone has the complete blessings of the state and is a law unto itself¹¹. Part of the Zone’s dominance lies in controlling, or attempting to control the discourse around landness. Contra the painstaking, patchwork putting together of unfixed land for the Amoebal Zone, the prevalent narrative from its developers and supporters is one of fixity and flatness. The origin story of the Zone from those who are building it, and the

¹¹ Activists and a journalist, interview near the Zone, December 2008

story of its continued development is one of flattening out of the land: its characteristics, as also any claims and uses related to it. This land was underutilised waste, and is being forged into value by the entrepreneurialism of the developer. I have alluded to the linearity attributed to the Zone in the story of Ali the fishworker and the SEZ manager (also Gidwani 1992, Baka 2013).

The Zone may be built on the premise of fixity: of fixing waste to make value. However, it is being challenged on this conceit of thingness. The unfixity of land is front and centre in this challenge. The Zone was initiated amid conflict. A loose coalition of stakeholders, including salt manufacturers, farmers and pastoralists' organisations, Hindu nationalist groups, and the area's landed, upper caste Rajput groups opposed the initial salt manufacturing initiative. They organised protests, petitions to the government, marches, and even discussions via representatives in the national parliament¹². Opposition was on the greater claim of local manufacturers, workers and land users on the resources of the area; and importantly, the symbolic association of salt with colonialism. Opponents recounted Gandhi's breaking of British salt laws, by marching to coastal Dandi in Gujarat in order to make salt. They too threatened to march against what they perceived to be renewed foreign occupation, given that the main partner of the Zone's Indian developer was a multinational (Karliner 1997). Eventually, the multinational withdrew from the project, leaving behind land that had been variably, unfixedly invoked for its memories and history, as also claims of longstanding access.

After some years of latency, the adversarial political re-emerged alongside renewed activity on the Zone's land. For instance in the year 2000, fishworkers organised a 42-day sit in on being evicted from a local fishing harbour, and from their shelters along the coast that are set up during the fishing months. The fishworkers were arguing for their 'home', based on longstanding claims to the land and the sea¹³. They were also appealing to the state's authority over land, which could officially recognise these claims. Thus speaking on behalf of fishworkers, an activist said 'when the fishworkers learnt of the development coming to the coast, they also demanded land from the government. They are on this land for 9 months of the year. They don't have title but they have ample proof that they have been resident here

¹² Interview with Hindu nationalist activist, Gandhinagar, 20/9/2004

¹³ Fishworkers, interview, town neighbouring the Zone, 21/12/2008

for generations. They have public records for the last 100 years, photos, [food] ration receipts.¹⁴

As fishworkers were taking up adversarial positions against the Zone on grounds of enlivened claims to the land, established access, and the state's authority to adjudicate and confirm these claims, local pastoralists and farmers were doing the same. They organised protests and sit-ins outside the offices of government authorities that were giving over grazing commons to the Zone. Again, the traditional links of these groups and of their animals to the land were cited as points of contention. The register of state authority was also brought to bear on the political in land, with pastoralists citing a government order that mandated 16.2 hectares of grazing land per 100 heads of cattle (Kohli et al 2010).

If land is multi-faceted and unfixed, the building of political opposition to its takeover and discursive and material flattening is also varied. Initial protest to the Zone along registers of access, enlivenment and appeals to state authority has been generally rebuffed in a regulatory order where land as property has dominance. Thus from the late 2000s, sit-ins, petitions and marches against the Zone have carried on, but with adversariality being built on its destruction of the environment. From the late 2000s, several letters and petitions were addressed to the government in Gujarat and Delhi. An important theme in these letters is the destruction of mangroves due to the building of the Zone. The national Ministry of Environment and Forests for instance is urged to halt this destruction, and to set up an independent committee of enquiry to look into environmental violations by the Zone (Kohli et al 2010, 8-15). In this case, land is being viewed through a register of fluid ecological value. The fight for land spills over into the fight for mangroves that grow off the coast. Significantly, in asking for an independent arbiter, petitioners are acknowledging schisms in the state as idea versus the state in practice (Abrams 1988). Opponents appeal to the regulatory idea of the state, recognise its flaws, and attempt to move past the state's partisan arbitration.

The theme of the environmental impact of the Zone is recurrent in the political adversarial. Public hearings mandated by the state have often witnessed vocal opposition. For instance in November 2008, a public hearing was fixed to discuss the Waterfront Development Plan.

¹⁴ Interview, town neighbouring the Zone, 21/12/2008

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During the hearing, which saw representations from various stakeholders, local cultivators challenged the ‘misleading’ information in the Environment Impact Assessment of the project. They suggested it is ‘wrongly mentioned that there is no cultivable land’. The Company’s excessive use of water was questioned, with a figure of 20 lakh liters a day being provided. This was especially stark in an area prone to drought. Intake channels for sea water constructed by the Company were leading to salinity ingress, affecting agriculture, the ground water and fishing environments. (Gujarat Pollution Control Board 2008, Annexure B: 2). The farmers at the hearing were challenging tropes of the land’s barrenness put forward by the project developer. Instead they were accusing the Zone of creating barrenness by letting the sea take over the land.

The political has been built against the Zone in varied registers of landness, and through different means of protest. The most formal of these appeals has been in the taking of the adversarial to court over several points in the course of the project. The adversarial in court too has traversed different meanings of land depending on context and traction among adjudicating bodies. For instance, in 2004 fishworkers approached the High Court against the blocking of their fishing routes via two creeks that had been incorporated by the Zone. Their petition was dismissed as the Court felt the creeks in question were not suitable for access to the high seas owing to its security sensitivity. Here, a territorial interpretation of land was trumping one of land as access: both to resources such as land and the sea, and to livelihood (Kohli et al 2010). Arguments around land as access turn towards environmental and enlivenment concerns in more recent court cases. In 2008, a local businessman with links to the fishing community approached the High Court, challenging the destruction of mangroves. An investigation into environmental violations was ordered. However, government departments that the Court heard absolved the Company of any wrongdoing; a familiar scenario in cases of environmental violations in India (Sud 2009).

As one after another avenue for agonism has shut down, the sheer scope of the project has allowed further fronts for political assertion to open up. In the introduction, we came across the Ultra Mega Power Plant, which was established partly on land that was initially sanctioned for the Zone’s SEZ. In 2011, in a scalar ratcheting up of the political, fishworkers approached the international funders of the UMPP: the Asian Development Bank (ADB) and the International Finance Corporation (IFC) of the World Bank. A local Union of fishworkers, with connections to social movements and resource rights organisations in

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3 metropolitan India as well as abroad, helped shape the appeal. In the case of the IFC, the
4 fishworkers filed a formal complaint with the Compliance Advisor Ombudsman (CAO),
5 citing the project's 'adverse social and environmental harms' (MASS 2011, 1). Their detailed
6 letter to the CAO discusses physical displacement of fishworkers; declining fish catch due to
7 deteriorating marine ecology; curtailment of fishworkers' rights of access to the sea via
8 fencing; loss of commons land used by women for drying fish; blocking of creeks and paths
9 along the coast by water channels constructed for discharging effluents to the sea, etc.
10 (MASS 2011, 2-3).
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18 Here, many dimensions of land are being cited by the adversaries. Land is access, home,
19 settlement, livelihood, and it is environmentally enlivened. In response, an audit by the CAO
20 found that the project did not fully take into account 'the differing values attached to
21 biodiversity by specific stakeholders' (CAO 2013, 3-4). In a rare instance, the opponents of
22 the Zone are being validated by an autonomous body linked to a powerful funder of a Zonal
23 project.
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29 Of course, an independent ombudsman is at the periphery of dominant institutions. The
30 Bank's International Finance Corporation refuted the CAO's findings. It indicated 'we do
31 not... share CAO's view... (George and Bulmer for IFC 2013, 1). This response has not
32 rebuffed the advance of the political. With their complaints via the IFC's internal channels
33 being rejected, fishworkers joined by farmers, took the IFC to court in its headquarters: the
34 USA. They were once again resorting to agonistic, political means to assert their place in the
35 long battle for the land and its many entwinements with their environment, lives and
36 livelihoods.
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45 In April 2015, fishworkers and farmers filed a suit against the IFC. They were represented
46 pro bono by EarthRights International (ERI), an NGO deploying advocacy and the law for
47 human rights and the environment. At the federal court in Washington DC, the plaintiffs
48 alleged that the IFC caused loss to their livelihoods, destroyed their lands and water, and
49 created threats to their health by funding the UMPP (ERI 2015). In March 2016, a judge
50 dismissed the case. He ruled that the IFC, as the private lending arm of the World Bank, was
51 entitled to 'absolute immunity' from legal action. The plaintiffs then moved the D.C. Circuit
52 Court of Appeals. While noting the damage caused, and the 'dismal' condition of the
53 plaintiffs, the Court upheld the immunity rule (ERI 2016). The opponents moved the US
54 Supreme Court.
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In March 2019, the Supreme Court overturned the decision of the lower courts. A majority bench, with one dissenting judge, ruled that the IFC could indeed be taken to court by affected communities if projects it financed proved harmful. With this decision, the immunity enjoyed by international funders located in countries outside a project's remit has been shaken. Yet, the fishworkers and others who are gearing up to sue the UMPP have a long road ahead. The Supreme Court victory only means that they can now begin the painstaking process of approaching lower courts in the US. Among other matters, the district courts will deliberate on the types of loans that are open for legal action (Chavkin 2019; Hurley 2019). At the time of writing this paper, an activist involved in the matter told me that the plaintiffs have recently filed a case against the IFC in a lower court in the US¹⁵.

This is where the state of play is at in the making of the political around the Zone. Local protest to the Zone is now occasional and minimal. The theatre of the political has gone international. Besides the battle in the US courts, key participants in the Zonal struggle have been consulted by other land-rights movements. The latter are responding to the expanding footprint of the Zone's developer. The developer is building or managing infrastructure, including ports and airports, as also mines, in different parts of India and abroad. A high decibel political struggle against the developer in Australia has repeatedly called on the experience of the political actors of the Gujarat Zone.

At the time of finalising this paper for publication, a news report alerted me to the potential shut down of the UMPP which has become a focus of adversariality to the Zone in recent years. In declining economic conditions in India and globally, the UMPP operator has petitioned sub-national states to which it supplies power. This is to allow for an increase in per unit power charges to meet rising operating costs. The UMPP management has threatened shutdown if its demands are not met. Activists associated with the Zone have been sharply critical of an environmentally destructive and financially risky project that may well have a running life of approximately seven years. The possible closure of the UMPP will have repercussions for the court cases it is embroiled in. As the capacity of capital for 'creative' destruction plays out in the Zone, the Zone itself continues to morph. With the Zone's ups and downs, the political changes too. Reflecting on this, an activist informant told me,

¹⁵ Activist, personal communication, 31/5/2019

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3 'people drop out [of the struggle]. They give up. They may even be bought over with jobs or
4 [material inducements]. But others join in.'¹⁶ Will this activist be proven wrong? Will the
5 potential closure of the UMPP dissipate the political around the Zone at large? We cannot
6 say.
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11 Despite this note of uncertainty, a key point must be made. The changing nature of the
12 political against a flexible, Amoebal Zone, needs to be put in context. We are discussing an
13 international corporate conglomerate with close links with sub-national, national and
14 international governance institutions. This conglomerate has been challenged repeatedly by a
15 motley group of farmers, fishworkers, pastoralists and activists. In managing to be adversarial
16 despite the odds, the Zone's opponents have demonstrated a protracted and pervasive
17 advance. This advance is irrespective of the contingencies of their daily struggles. Theirs is
18 the encroachment of ordinary people on the spaces and entitlements of the propertied and
19 powerful. For my informants, the political is a matter of survival, as they hold on to the hope
20 of improving their lives some day (Bayat 2013). This is the 'perpetual pursuit of life chances'
21 (Bayat 2013, 80) *alongside land's perpetual possibilities*. The agonistic political in the case
22 of the Zone has centred on the opening, and keeping open of spaces in which these claims
23 can be made, even or especially in contexts where the adversary is overwhelmingly
24 dominant.
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38 Yet even in this context, we cannot deny that by and large, the adversarial-political is up
39 against an order-maintaining alliance. In the case of land in my field site, this alliance brings
40 together, and perpetuates, the state, big business and status quoist law (Kannabiran 2014).
41 This constitution of the dominant order is not static. In the region of my study, law and the
42 state had been on the side of agrarian capital in India's mid-20th century, post-independence
43 period. Land reform benefited upper and middle caste landowners and tenant farmers. They
44 received land from princely estates, that had largely sided with the British under colonialism.
45 Land to the tiller was meant to accelerate efficient food production (Sud 2012). Moreover,
46 primary sector activities like fishing and pastoralism had a little more space in this ordering
47 of society than they do now.
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¹⁶ Activist, Skype interview, 13/11/2018

After India liberalised in 1991, the onus has shifted to industrial and infrastructural capital, with the institutional order reflecting this. The changed logics of order play out in the political and P(p)olitics around the Zone. While some upper and middle caste farmers who benefited from land reform have opposed the Zone, others have chosen to ally with it via the mediations and compromises of P(p)olitics. In other words, those who held a place of dominance previously are either shifting positions to align with the newly dominant, or entrenching their position to oppose the new. Those at the peripheries of the old order such as fishworkers have little choice but to resort to the political as a means of survival. But even within this marginal group, we see crossovers to the Zone via the machinations of P(p)olitics. The perpetual pursuit of life chances as Bayat puts it, is varied, much like the land through which it plays out. I turn to this P(p)olitics that attempts to order and fix land and the Zone next.

3. Doing P(p)olitics

In reading reports of the numerous court cases and other confrontations that define the political trajectory of the Zone, it is not unusual to come across statements like: the parties reached a 'compromise' out of court; the matter was 'settled'; the suit was disposed of by a 'consent' decree (Kohli et al 2010, 12-13). Amidst the confrontational lies a vast space of politics for the settling of seemingly irreconcilable differences. Analytically, politics relates to the patterns and systems through which societies are organised and managed. In this are included activities of questioning, contestation and conflict, be they peaceful or not, but also negotiation, cooperation, capitulation and even coercion, over the use and distribution of power and resources (Leftwich 2004). As suggested in the Introduction, I explore the politics of unfixed land in its everyday form, and in the more institutionalised set-up of Party Politics. I call the combination P(p)olitics.

My field respondents take a matter of fact view of 'politics', a term they use themselves. There is too much 'politics' in land, says an NGO worker and resident of the town where the Zone is headquartered¹⁷. She recounts the various middlemen, linked to communities of fishworkers and pastoralists, who 'play' this politics. A consultant who works for the Zone tells me NGO personnel too act as middlemen, mediating tensions around the Zone for cash¹⁸. Taking a cue from the data, but going past the cynicism of witnessing input-output machines for the delivery of cash and compromise-- I focus on middlemen below.

¹⁷ Interview, 21/12/2008

¹⁸ Interviewed 20/12/2008, Gandhinagar,

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3 Middlemen mediate land deals (Sud 2014b), and the politics inherent to these. Middlemen are
4 likely to be people who sold land initially and/or those who occupy higher status positions in
5 a society undergoing land transitions. This enables them to intercede on behalf of others
6 (Levien 2015). Middlemen are by no means the only actors doing politics in my field sites.
7 Politics is all encompassing. However, being in the middle of processes of politics, tracing
8 middlemens' actions also sheds light on the stakeholders they engage with and allows for a
9 snapshot of the field.
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17 A prominent intermediary of politics in and around the Zone is a former fish trader. After
18 initially opposing the Zone, he later developed the reputation of having been 'paid off' by the
19 Zone management. As one of my NGO informants indicates '[when one of the power plants
20 was being built], a full settlement of fishworkers was removed. There was no compensation
21 as they don't own the coastland... The [Developer] paid crores to the fishworkers'
22 middleman. This middleman's job was to pay fishworkers 20,000 to 30,000 rupees per family
23 to move... [The middleman] also got a petrol tanker and transport business linked to the
24 factories [in the Zone]. Later he fell out with the developer; the petrol tanker was taken away.
25 Then he filed another case against them. But who knows when he will link up with them
26 again...'19 Ten years after this interview, the middleman is a well-known real estate
27 developer. He also dabbles in mining operations. He works with the Zone, but his interests
28 stretch beyond.
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39 The politics of mitigating the political by withdrawing from it, settling it, compromising,
40 curtailing protest, being paid off, and paying others off that this middleman's case represents
41 fits the thematic of incorporation. We hear about modes of incorporation, of being drawn into
42 the capitalist projects being built over land in many parts of the world, in the more recent
43 literature on land grab (Hall et al 2015). If the political disrupts, incorporation appeases,
44 smoothen, fits in. Incorporation, like the political oppositional, is not universal,
45 homogenous, or temporally unchanging. The paragraphs below show newly incorporated,
46 intermediary collaborators of the Zone manoeuvring the politics of its formation. They are
47 involved in projects of Zone-making on and in the land. This includes the regulatory
48 smoothening of the land, its material making, territorial shaping and propertyfication.
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¹⁹ Interview, activist, 21/12/2008, near The Zone

To elaborate, the jobs, contracts, cash pay-outs, and threats associated with incorporation buy or coerce consent. This consent enforces silence over the political. Silence is evident in contentious spaces like public hearings that are held to discuss various regulatory phases of the Zone. This regulatory process needs to manoeuvre the dramas and performances of democratic decision-making (Rai and Spary 2018). A farmer from a village adjacent to the Zone talks about pasture passing on to businesses in and around the Zone. '...the Sarpanch was with them. The Talati [Local Revenue Officer] was also involved. Two public hearings happened. You could see how much people have changed their side in these two hearings. People making noise in the first were with the Company in the second.'²⁰ The intermediated politics of making consent eases the regulatory path of land-making for the Zone.

The unfixing of land from one regulatory state to another may be followed up with material change and smoothening. Unfixed land is materially re-fixed to fit development projects. The politics of the incorporated is key to these projects in my field sites. For instance, one of my land middlemen interviewees in a village adjacent to the Zone has links to a larger transport and sand contractor who works for a manufacturing Company that now dominates the landscape of his village. The Company was established on land bought with the assistance of my interviewee's upper caste community of landowners. By persistently hanging out at the gate of the factory, and making friends with the guards, he was able to start working with the sand supplier. He is the sand supplier's local contact for when sand rejected by the factory needed dumping. In many instances, property is possessed by dumping construction material and sand on it. The Amoebal Zone too has been accused of sand dumping to block creeks, and to make water into land (Narain et al 2013). Local big men and fixers are part of this ecosystem of re-fixing, or flattening unfixed land into landscapes of infrastructure building and accumulation. In the words of my interviewee 'I told them I will take care of their sand. I took the truck to some empty zameen... These trucks carry 17 tonne of *khulee* [loose] sand. It is a lot.'²¹

Besides the everyday politics that contributes to the regulatory and material making of the Zone, we also witness territorial practices of land-making and land-fixing. In an earlier section we have witnessed the Zone as a highly securitised space where territorial boundaries are constantly made and underlined. The everyday politics of the incorporated reinforces

²⁰ Interview, 18/8/2015, Lahiyaria

²¹ Interview, 24/8/15, Lahiyaria

territorial divisions of the 'us' and the 'other'. For instance, for my middlemen interviewees, migrant labourers from other parts of India are potential troublemakers. This migrant 'other' needs to be kept at arm's length, and must be disciplined through routinised territoriality. Thus, 'we have *soch* [thinking] that we will not keep non-Gujaraatis in this *gaon* [village]. That is why these colonies [for largely low and middle caste Company labour] are important. We have a high Rajput [upper caste] culture, which we don't want spoiled by others.'²² Continuing on this trajectory, another middleman interlocutor draws a stipend from a labour contractor for managing minor riots and disturbances in labour colonies near the Zone. He stops any *lafda* or *unionbaazi* (untoward incident such as a fight, attempts at labour unionisation) before the matter reaches the authorities²³.

Like territory-making, property-making too is carried out with the mediation of those the Zone has incorporated. In a quote from a farmer above, we heard about some resistance to the passing of pasture to the Zone. However, the headman of the village was in favour of this transfer and eventually managed the resistance. Similarly, I heard from a Sarpanch who defended the privatisation of the commons in his village. 'Under CSR [Corporate Social Responsibility], [the Zone Developer] has done a lot for the place. [The developer has built a] great school and hospital. For some *gauchars* (pastures) taken, they also send truckloads of grass.'²⁴ Here, the anti-politics of CSR turns rights-bearing citizens into selectively chosen recipients of Company welfare (also Chhotray 2011). As the Sarpanch cited above also says, '[I have a] team... Twenty people are with me. I delegate work.'²⁵ The upper caste, Hindu members of the Sarpanch's team disburse welfare routed from the Company among their collaborators, while also building consensus for transfers of land, and for cooperation during public hearings. As CSR largesse is being disbursed, commonly accessed land passes over into private ownership as property, sanctioned by the state and the village leadership. Other strands of politics, such as regulatory consent-making and territorial demarcation intersect with this property-making in the construction of the land we summarily call The Zone.

What we see in these pages is the making of the Zone via negotiating politics in and around its land. As the political questions and confronts the Zone, politics makes the Zone possible. This politics, which incorporates influential members of socially and numerically dominant

²² Landed Rajput, middleman, interviewed 22/8/2015, Lahiyaria

²³ Middleman, interview 25/8/2015

²⁴ Sarpanch, interview, Lahiyaria, 11/8/2018

²⁵ Sarpanch, interview, Lahiyaria, 11/8/2018

groups such as upper caste Rajput farmers and fishworkers' representatives, brings some order, even fixity to the Zone. The Zone is being fixed into the spatial logic of capitalist accumulation (Harvey 2001). However, the core contention of this section is that this ordering of the Zone is taking place along the contours of land's unfixity. A seemingly fixing, flattening project of contemporary Zone-making, which can be imagined in any part of the world under global capitalist production, is enabled by the very context-specific politics of unfixed land.

Moving on to Politics with a big 'P', Party Politics and everyday politics mingle in and around the Zone. They feed off each other in processes of unfixing land from a range of uses and meanings and re-fixing it to the needs of the Zone. Continuing with the example of the contractors and middlemen incorporated by the politics of the Zone, I demonstrate how their manoeuvring of land, and the politics around it, marks them as local big men (also Reddy and Haragopal 1985; Krishna 2011; Berenschot 2011; Sud 2014b). These local big men develop, and are keen to be seen as developing, the reputation of making money, gaining influence, being patrons, and getting things done (Kapur and Vaishnav 2018). As their land work earns them a public profile, it paves the way for their entry into Politics. If they were already in Politics, it announces their readiness for bigger Party jobs.

Local big men who intermediate the politics of land can affiliate with the two main Parties of Gujarat. The ruling Party is the Hindu nationalist BJP. It has been in power since 1998 and has largely overseen the development of the Zone. The Opposition Congress was in power in Gujarat almost continuously till 1990, but has significantly weakened since. The Congress was once an umbrella Party that attracted different social groups that it had united during India's freedom movement. In Gujarat, the Party lost much of its upper caste Hindu support base in the 1980s to two key events. One was the attempt to push through affirmative action via increased reservation in public jobs and education for the so-called backward castes. This was accompanied by the building of an electoral coalition of some upper castes, and numerically strong backward castes, Dalit 'untouchable' castes and Muslims. This coalition building was necessitated by the rise of the BJP, which was formed in 1980. Gujarat's second key event was the attack on a mediaeval mosque in far off Ayodhya in 1992. The Hindu Right claims the mosque was erected by the Mughal emperor Babur over the birthplace (*janmabhoomi*) of Lord Ram. Gujarat has been a stronghold of the Ram temple movement

from the mid-1980s. Gujarati Hindu participation in this movement sealed the fortunes of the avowedly more secular Congress (Sud 2012).

In this context of State Politics, it is not surprising to see the majority of those interviewed as middlemen for the Zone siding with the BJP. Take for example the village Sarpanch who extolled the CSR largesse of the Zone's developers in the pages above. This Sarpanch has also channelled common land from his village towards the Zone or related industrial projects. The Sarpanch's land work has allowed him to rise in the Party ranks. Today, he is involved in local election campaigns. Party propaganda material is easily available in his office; a space that also displays his photographs with State BJP leaders²⁶. As an upper caste Hindu Rajput, the Sarpanch and his family identify deeply with the land. This is their '*baap dada ki zamin*', i.e. the land of their forefathers²⁷. This land of enlivened history, memory, and longstanding claims of access and property, may be passing on in part, or even whole, to post-liberalisation projects like the Zone. Yet traditionally influential groups still see themselves as the land's guardians, and land as their guardian. As a BJP-supporting Rajput middleman's wife put it, this land is still providing for us, even when it has been sold to outsiders²⁸. Land as provider is to be seen in an economic sense, but importantly as a provider of the P(p)olitics of power, legitimacy and continued relevance.

The BJP-supporting Sarpanch middleman who works with land's unfixity is able to bring on board his supporters and constituents via contracts, promised jobs, and CSR. His widening of the net of compliance for the Zone, and the relative curtailment of protest in the moment, brings further recognition in Party Politics. Recently, the headman received an award for running the 'best panchayat' from senior BJP functionaries. This award needs to be seen in a context wherein the BJP-led Government of Gujarat encourages '*samras gram*' or harmonious villages free from discord (Sud 2012). This includes the discord of the political, adversarial towards state-sanctioned development epitomised by the Zone. With his increasing stature in the building of this politics of compromise, compliance and incorporation, the headman is poised to play a prominent role in local and sub-national Party Politics.

²⁶ Field diary, August 2015

²⁷ Interviewed in Lahiyaria, 15/8/2015

²⁸ Field diary, August 2015

While the affiliation of local strongmen of P(p)olitics with the BJP seems logical, there are some who have tied their fortunes to the Opposition Congress. Among these is a local farmers' leader who has been the Sarpanch of a village adjacent to the Zone. This village has lost farmland and common land to the Zone and related industry. The farmer leader has consistently protested this, even taking the Zone's developers to court albeit unsuccessfully. While the farmer leader shares a caste with the Sarpanch discussed in the previous paragraph, his positionality on land and the P(p)olitics of the Zone is different. For him, loyalty to the land as history, memory and ancestry cannot be divorced from access and property claims to this land. After facing threats of violence for his political actions against the Zone, the farmer leader is now part of the Congress Party. This is a source of security and legitimacy for this man's practice of the political and Politics around the Zone²⁹.

Another Congress member who is involved in the political and P(p)olitics of the Zone is the Muslim former fish trader-turned middleman and contractor we encountered earlier in this paper. We have already got a glimpse of this man's flourishing businesses that service the Zone. But as a Party Politician on the make, he also reaches out to constituencies he might have antagonised. The middleman-turned-politician regularly organises community functions, such as mass wedding ceremonies for poor fishworkers where costs are pooled and subsidised by him. Well known politicians from the Congress Party are seen at these functions. These politicians, and the middleman-politician canvass votes among those dispossessed by the Zone, many of whom are still antagonistic to it. The politics of settlement co-exists with the adversariality of the political in these instances. The politicians' constituents are reconciled to Parties '*jo mil baant ke rehte hain. Mil ke khao* [parties collaborate and eat together]. *Politics is business here*. They say *hum yahan pe settle karenin. Upar ka politics alag hai* [we will make settlements here. Upper level, or national Politics is different].'³⁰

While Party lines are drawn around local big men who largely support or oppose the Zone, the preceding quote puts these variations in perspective. The Congress and BJP want to project starkly different takes on the Zone. In fact, when the Congress was in power in the central government, it even instituted an enquiry into the environmental and land-based violations of the Zone (Narain et al 2013). This enquiry was demanded by the political

²⁹ Activist, interview, 13/11/2018, Skype

³⁰ Activist, interview, 13/11/2018, Skype

opponents of the Zone, and was led by a committee of independent scientists and environmentalists. However, the damning report and recommendations of the committee were not implemented by the Congress government, and completely quashed by the BJP government that succeeded it in Delhi in 2014 (Shrivastava and Sethi 2018). This operational sameness of Politics should not surprise us given that a Congress alliance government initiated the Zone in 1992. The multiplicity of land, and the many takes that actors from the world of the political and P(p)olitics have on it, allows for the performing of stark difference, as also the meeting of positions.

Conclusion

Everyday politics and Party Politics somewhat re-fixes land for capitalist accumulation in the Zone. So is this the end of the story? My concluding contention is that land that is being re-fixed for projects of infrastructure and industry via the order-making of everyday and Party P(p)olitics, continues being multi-faceted. In this land, which remains much more than a commodity, the middlemen-broker-politicians discussed above are called upon to control *dhamaal* [unruliness] by territorially demarcated labourer 'outsiders'. This land continues facing fishworkers' and farmers' political claims that speak to registers of enlivenment, access, longstanding territorial links, and more. As the political oppositional carries on across scale, it also takes more everyday forms of politics and negotiation via land's unfixity. Thus, fishworkers seek visitation rights to their sacred sites within the Zone. The Zone considers this, but also constructs its own temples as a counter claim (Sud, forthcoming). Land that is continually unruly via the many claims and counter-claims that are made around it, is sought to be ordered not just as commodified property. It may also be ordered and somewhat settled as sacred, or as territory.

Meanwhile this is also land where multiple Party Politicians contest continually over influence, and contracts, and where local strongmen threaten to dump construction material, sand, or re-start a dispute if they are sidelined. In being commodified property that belongs to the Zone, but also existing in varied registers of landness, land that has been re-fixed for capitalist accumulation, continues being unfixed. P(p)olitics temporarily orders land, but it does not hold this land in a state of uni-dimensional fixity. In confronting land that continues being unfixed, P(p)olitics itself must remain open to unpredictability and change. It would be overly simplistic to collapse this complex story of the political, P(p)olitics and pushback into one of commodification. In any case, closing our eyes to this multi-dimensional and ongoing

story of socially entangled land is a profound disservice to those negotiating P(p)olitics, and the precarious political around the Amoebal Zone.

The ups and downs of the Zone, and the ups and downs of the political and P(p)olitics around it continue. The key contention of this paper has been that these multiplicities, these possibilities and openings of the political and P(p)olitics are inherent to, and intertwined with, the multiplicities and possibilities of unfixed land. The possibilities of the political, and the many directions of P(p)olitics in the Zone need not be replicated in every case of land transition. In other field sites I am investigating for a larger project, the political has not been pronounced. It has not attracted the trans-scalar amplifiers and support received by those opposing the Amoebal Zone of this study. In these cases, the political in unfixed land may be taken over, even dominated by the incorporation, settlement, and compromises of P(p)olitics. Yet in further sites of land transition in India such as a proposed bauxite mine in Niyamgiri, Orissa, or a planned port project on the Ennore-Pulicat wetlands near Chennai, Tamil Nadu, the unfixity and many meanings of land have driven the political and P(p)olitics. In Niyamgiri, the sacrality and enlivenment of the land to indigenous groups has been a largely successful rallying cry of the political. In Ennore-Pulicat, the richness of the wetland ecosystem, its commercial value to local populations, and its local meanings and enlivened histories, are being drawn on in a build-up of the political in the present. The path of the political in the latter case, like in all such cases, is likely to be as complex as the lives of the land it invokes. Yet, the urgency of dwelling on this complexity and multiplicity in any understanding of land and society is unquestionable. This is even more the case in the age of Anthropocenic climate change wherein linear models of profit-centric development are coming into question. The many lives of unfixed land, and of the institutions that socially entangled land co-produces will potentially allow us to write new, richer and more rounded stories of our societies.

Even in this journal special issue, the cases from China are ripe for this kind of ‘unfixed’ analysis. Thus, C.J. Chen tells us that social conflict over land seizure is the biggest cause of collective protest in rural China. J. Zeng’s analysis furthers this understanding by also showing resistance to the standardisation of land use rights. In the framework of my argument, China’s standardisation of land titles is an attempt to fix land by the current regime. This ordered land is aimed to be transferred to individuals and businesses that can

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3 generate new and productive uses out of fixity and systematisation³¹. At the same time, the
4 resistance that Chen and Zeng discuss highlights a much more diverse engagement with time,
5 as also land. Zeng's research protagonists can see that land titling may benefit current users.
6 However, this process would endanger access to land for future users. Even for local state
7 officials, titling may threaten their authority over the land and create more scope for
8 resistance, or the political as I term it in this paper.
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15 What we are seeing also in other papers in this special issue is the contestation of multiple
16 relationships and readings of land. The meanings and uses of land are pulled in different
17 directions by diverging social orders. Reading attempts to order by the state or big business,
18 and the persistence of disorder around land to even the smallest extent, is a unique window
19 on to a range of societies. Opening up such processes of politics and resistance in different
20 parts of the world via the multiplicity of the land that engenders this resistance, provides a
21 richer picture for the social scientist. It is in this continued multiplicity and unfixity of land
22 and societies that scholars, activists and others must look for possibilities beyond the single
23 story (Ngozi Adichie 2009). In multiplicity and unfixity we must find creativity, hope and
24 resilience.
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