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Territorializing Movement: the Politics of Occupation in Bangladesh

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Abstract

This paper considers the politics of land occupation in Bangladesh. Contentious politics have been conceptualised as 'societies in movement' by Raul Zibechi, defined through their attempts to disperse power through the reconfiguration of social relations between peasants, the state and capital. Drawing upon the author's ethnographic engagement with peasant farmer movements in Bangladesh since 2002, the paper analyses the differential powers generated in, by and through the production of relations and connections involved in land occupations. This requires a consideration of both relational and structural understandings of contentious politics.

Organizational structures and dynamics, as well as the 'resourcefulness' of social movements (e.g. their capacities to deploy material resources, skills and knowledges) enable land occupation since these are crucial in creating and maintaining the socio-material relations necessary for political activity to be prosecuted. Drawing together these insights, the paper conceptualises land occupation as a process of 'territorializing movement' articulated through three interwoven spatial practices: strategic occupation, reconfiguration of social relations and territorialization of translocal solidarities.

Keywords: Territory; social movement; land occupation; Bangladesh

Roads become rivers

"The sky has gone to bed" commented a Bangladeshi friend as we trundled by rickshaw down the dirt road from Bhurungamari, in Bangladesh's northern Kurigram district in August, 2009.

Cloud-filled, the silver grey sky was reflected in the turgid river's flow. The Monsoon - late,

erratic, increasing unpredictable as the climate changes - had finally arrived. The road disappeared beneath a torrent of water. He turned to me and added: "Rain comes, then river". The border town - 3km from West Bengal in India - sheltered from the rain. Jute rope hung over the bridges, jute sticks were stacked in inverted cones. The green jungle shimmered in the humid heat. I was travelling with activist cadres of the Bangladesh Krishok (farmer) Federation (BKF) the largest rural-based peasant movement in the country, and the Bangladesh Kishani Sabha (Women Farmers' Association, BKS). We moved through the rain, mud and jungle. We travelled from village to peasant communities, and from meeting to meeting passing river and padi, flooded fields and peasant huts. Rural roads are poorly maintained and bus services are infrequent, making visits by BKF and BKS cadres to villages important organizing events. We stayed in the simple homes of the landless peasants and eat fiery fish curry with rice. We drank well water turned muddy red with oxidizing iron and black *chai* (tea) scented with cloves. Meetings held with peasant communities act as mobilising encounters that form part of the place-based practices of articulation – discursive, spatial and material practices that enable connection between different sites of action and movements (Davies and Featherstone, 2013) – involved in land occupation in Bangladesh as landless peasants attempt to reconfigure social relations, and in so doing “bring a territory into existence” (The Invisible Committee, 2009: 108).

Contentious politics over material resources such as land, water and forests involves political and spatial strategies of territorialization for communities (such as landless peasants) frequently deemed disposable within the terrain of state and developmentalist politics (Banerjee, 2012; Levein, 2013; Mamanta, 2013). Such contentious politics have been conceptualised as 'societies in movement', defined through their attempts to disperse power through the reconfiguration of social relations between peasants, the state and capital, and understood through a focus on the flows and circulation that generate such social relations and territories (Zibechi, 2010; 2012). This resonates with accounts of assemblage and articulation that stress the dynamic and processual character of political activity and the socio-material relations generated

therein (e.g. Featherstone, 2011; Davies, 2012). In order to analyse land occupation politics in Bangladesh, I want to draw upon this research and my ethnographic engagement with the BKF and BKS (hereafter BKF/BKS) since 2002 to analyse the differential powers generated in, by and through the production of relations and connections involved in land occupations. I will argue that this requires a consideration of the organizational structures and dynamics that enable land occupation to take place, and the ‘resourcefulness’ (MacKinnon and Derickson, 2012) of social movements (i.e. their capacities to access and deploy material resources, skills, knowledges and processes of recognition). These are crucial in creating and maintaining the socio-material relations necessary for political activity to be prosecuted. Attention to such organizational logics provides insights into who performs the work of fashioning political connections (Davies, 2012) and the character of those connections – a key concern of work on assemblages. This will also enable insights into the potentials and problems associated with ‘societies in movement’ (Zibechi, 2010; 2012). Drawing upon these insights, I will conceptualise land occupation as a process of ‘territorializing movement’ articulated through three interwoven spatial practices: strategic occupation, reconfiguration of social relations and territorialization of translocal solidarities.

This paper proceeds by discussing contemporary research on territory and contentious action, before proceeding to discuss the socio-environmental context of Bangladesh. The paper then analyses land occupation struggles in Bangladesh focusing on the politics of articulation, including spatial practices of occupation, reconfiguration and translocalization. From this analysis the paper proposes the notion of ‘territorializing movement’ as a conceptual tool by which to understand the practices of land occupation by social movements. Finally the paper concludes with some thoughts on the politics of territorializing movement and the implications for prosecuting social change.

I draw on research materials gathered from my ongoing collaboration with the BKF/BKS. I first started working with the movement in 2002 in my role as one of the facilitators of People’s Global Action (Asia) (PGA Asia) – one of the regional networks of the international alter-

globalisation network of social movements, People's Global Action in which the BKF/BKS participated (Routledge, 2003a). My research strategy continues to involve politically engaged and committed research that is practice-based and conducted in horizontal collaboration with social movements (Routledge, 2002; Juris, 2008). This has meant participating with the BKF and BKS in research visits to Bangladesh in 2002, 2004 (twice), and 2009; helping to organise solidarity-building activities such as an international PGA Asia conference that took place in Dhaka, Bangladesh in 2004 (Routledge, 2008); and in 2011, participating in a Climate Change, Gender and Food Sovereignty Caravan organized and devised by the BKF, BKS and the international peasant farmers' network *La Via Campesina* (the peasant way, LVC) (see Routledge, forthcoming [a]).

In particular, I have developed ongoing work and trust relations with the President of the BKF and some of the key activist cadres who perform important mobilizing roles in the process of land occupation. While in Bangladesh I have travelled with these cadres to land occupation sites; attended organizing meetings concerning land occupation with them; and used their English language skills for interpreting some of my interviews with BKF and BKS members. Concerning the Caravan, I was involved in helping to raise funds for, document and participate in the Caravan. I was an active member of the Caravan, speaking at and leading many of the workshops and seminars that were held, as well as interviewing Caravan participants. Research data was generated during five research visits to Bangladesh through participant observation, interviews and ongoing discussions with key movement actors. However, I am acutely aware of my privileged positionality as a white, male, able, Western scholar-activist in such contexts, not least the pronounced differences in physical mobility across space, access to resources such as money and technology, ability to leave when I chose to do so etc., between me and most of those whom I interviewed. As such, the peasants of the BKF and BKS can only, in this paper, be represented through my contacts' and my own interpretations (Spivak, 1988).

Territory and contentious action

Societies in movement

From research on social movements in Latin America, Raul Zibechi (2012) and Arturo Escobar (2008) argue that territory is *the* crucial space in which contentious politics are fashioned, understood as both material territory (involving struggles over the access, control, use and configuration of environmental resources such as land, soil, water, biodiversity, as well as the physical territory of communities, infrastructure etc.) and immaterial territory (involving struggles over ideas, knowledges, beliefs, conceptions of the world etc.) (see also Bauman, 2003 on the importance of grounded relationships, and Fernandes, discussed in Rosset and Martinez-Torres, 2012).

For Zibechi (2010; 2012), territorial control of specific physical spaces by social movements and the attendant securing of resources such as land, enables movement members to provide their own subsistence needs, which in turn enables a dispersal of power from the state and capital. The social relations generated comprise territories *different* from those of capital and the state: "territory is the space in which to build a new social organization collectively, where new subjects take shape and materially and symbolically appropriate their space" (2012: 19). Under such circumstances, social movements are conceptualised as 'societies in movement', defined through their creation of social relations of autonomy characterised by the (re)appropriation of resources and increased potentials for cooperation and transversal connection. These may include such practices as the revalorization of peasant identities, the transformation of gender roles, and the generation of new types of knowledge and capacities that facilitate self-organization, and favour more horizontalist (i.e. non-hierarchical) organizational forms (see also Escobar, 2008; Agnew and Oslender, 2013).

However, Zibechi acknowledges how social movement-state relations are not those of exteriority: the contentious politics of movements constantly performs a "double movement of struggle and co-existence" (2010:141) with the state (see also Routledge, 1996). Further, he argues that state logics and relations of force are manifested in social movement practices. For

Zibechi (2012) understanding social movements necessitates a focus less on forms of organization, structures and codes of mobilisation and more on social relations and territories to look at flows and circulation. However, I will argue that movement organizational practices and structures are critical in enabling key relational processes and connections to be generated and require as much consideration.

Zibechi's work has broader relevance beyond the context of Latin America. His concern with the material and immaterial resources associated with territory resonates with work on resourcefulness, while his focus on 'societies in movement' that generate social relations and territories resonates with geographers' recent relational and processual accounts of contentious politics and territory. His concern with the politics of autonomy resonates with analysis of autonomy from different contexts (e.g. Graeber, 2002; Pickerill and Chatterton, 2006; Holloway, 2010) and incorporates ongoing activist discussions on horizontal and vertical organizational logics within social movements and networks (e.g. see Juris, 2008; Routledge and Cumbers, 2009). As I will argue, such issues are also at stake in the politics of land occupation in Bangladesh. As peasants negotiate the vulnerabilities associated with landlessness and the violence that attends land struggles (see also Martinez-Alier, 2002; Mitchell, 2012; Correia, 2013), social movements' 'capacities to move' require an analysis of their organization structures, 'resourcefulness', relational dynamics and power dynamics. In order to begin to address this, it is useful to consider recent research on contentious politics within geography.

Contentious action, territory and geography

Geographers' earlier analyses of social movements sited collective action within territorially bounded (often local) contexts (Agnew, 1987; Harvey, 1995), arguing that the intensity of relations located in such contexts generate political activity. By contrast, relational approaches to space have emphasized its dynamic and fluid character and focused upon practices of connectivity (Massey, 2005). Relational accounts of the spatiality of contentious action (e.g. in networks) have noted the processual and dynamic character of such action (e.g. Featherstone,

2005; 2008; Cumbers, *et al*, 2008; Juris, 2008; Routledge, 2003; 2008; MacKinnon, 2010). Recently there have been attempts to reconcile territorial and relational accounts, differentiating between distinct territorial and relational conceptions (and dynamics) of place that are brought together in social movement spaces of action (e.g. Beaumont and Nicholls, 2007; Nicholls, 2009); or stressing the multiple spatialities involved in contentious action (Jessop *et al* 2008; Leitner *et al.*, 2008; Miller, 2013).

Taking the relational and territorial constitution of contentious action further, work on assemblage (e.g. McFarlane, 2009; Davies 2012), treats social formations as temporary aggregates of people and objects that cohere and disperse according to the circumstances of political activity. The social relations formed through such activities produce specific spatialities at particular times. Space is open to be shaped in particular ways by actors through the contingent relations, connections and practices they produce over time.

As Davies (2012) observes, such work needs to investigate further how the socio-material relations and connections necessary for the generation of political activity are produced and maintained; who does the work of forging these connections; and the character that such connections take. This must take into account that territories – however constituted – are implicated in existing geometries and structures of power and organization, as well as patterns of uneven development and these have impacts on the practice and spatiality of contentious action (MacKinnon, 2010). It must also take account of the persistent organizational structures associated with contentious action (see Miller, 2013).

While territory is socially produced, processual and relational in character it is “shaped by and a shaper of continuous processes of transformation, regulation, and governance” (Elden, 2013: 17; see also dell’Agnese, 2013), imbued with relations of power and claim making (Sassen, 2013). Territory is crucial in shaping the spatial imaginations of social movement actors because it produces opportunities for folk to fashion collective identifications around common (placed) interests (Nicholls, 2009; Wills, 2013). *Within and beyond* particular territories, attempts to generate

lived transformations are articulated through particular socio- ecological and organizational practices, relations, contestations and processes. These are implicated in the generation of connections necessary for the fashioning of political activity (Deleuze and Guattari, 1987; Haesbaert, 2013; Ince, 2012; Kennedy, 2011; Murphy, 2012; Klausner 2012; Raffestin, 2012; Sitrin, 2012).

In this paper, I contribute to work that attempts to incorporate structural and relational approaches to collective action (e.g. Nicholls, 2009; Nicholls, Miller and Beaumont, 2013) in order to examine the contradictions, dynamics and problems associated with ‘societies in movement’ and the dispersal of power in Bangladesh. I argue that the spatial practices of articulation involved in land occupation in Bangladesh can be conceptualized as ‘territorializing movement’ consisting of three interwoven spatial practices: strategizing occupation; reconfiguring social relations; and territorializing translocal solidarities. Analysis of these practices requires a consideration of the organizational structures and practices that enable land occupation to take place, including a social movement’s ‘resourcefulness’ (MacKinnon and Derickson, 2012): its capacity to deploy material resources, skills and knowledges and processes; and secure political recognition for the landless. These are crucial in creating and maintaining the socio-material relations necessary for political activity to be prosecuted. Before analyzing the practices of the BKF/BKS, I will briefly consider the context in which such land occupations in take place.

Socio-environmental marginality in Bangladesh

Land in Bangladesh is a source of constant violence – land seized by the powerful, deeds of ownership falsified by corrupt officials’ subdivided into uneconomic parcels by inheritance. But the most ferocious dispute of all is the constant struggle between land and sea (Seabrook, 2013: 40).

Much critical scholarship has looked at nature’s materiality and agency, particularly water (e.g. Swyngedouw, 1999; 2004b; Bakker, 2004; Bakker and Bridge, 2006; Loftus, 2007; Loftus and Lumsden, 2008; Sultana 2009). Agential nature, particularly water (in the form of cyclone

generated storm surges, flooding rivers and land salination) and at times droughts, shapes and disrupts the lives of poor peasants. Climate change exacerbates these weather events to which Bangladesh has been historically prone (Reuveny, 2007).

Bangladesh is located in the ‘tropic of chaos’ where the impacts of the catastrophic convergence of climate change, poverty, and violence are most acutely felt (Parenti, 2011). It is considered to be one of the most vulnerable countries in the world to climate change and sea level rise (IPCC, 2008). Rising sea levels along its coast is already occurring at a greater than the global rate (of 1.0-2.0mm/year) due to global sea level rise and local factors such as tectonic setting, sediment load and subsidence of the Ganges delta (Karim and Mimura, 2008). Further, the coastal region is particularly vulnerable to cyclonic storm surge floods due to its location in the path of tropical cyclones, the wide and shallow continental shelf and the funnelling shape of the coast (Paul and Dutt, 2010). Eighty per cent of the country consists of floodplains of the Ganges, Brahmaputra, Meghna and other rivers, which sustain 75 per cent of the country’s 160 million people (in 2011) (Brouwer *et al* 2007). The majority of the country’s population are poor and dependent on agriculture, and are thus more vulnerable to the impacts of changing climatic regimes, particularly flooding (Dasgupta *et al* 2011; Doyle and Chaturvedi, 2011; Gilman *et al.* 2011).

Land relations in Bangladesh, both pre- and post independence (1971), have been characterized by inequality and patronage. In the nineteenth century, land relations were characterised by a rentier landowning class of predominantly Hindu *zamindars*, and poor tenant farmers. Under British rule, as part of a strategy to counterbalance the power of Hindu elites a Muslim class of *jotedar* rich tenant farmers were given tenure rights through patronage relations with the colonial state. After the departure of Hindu *zamindars* in 1947, the rich peasant classes saw property rights established and the *jotedars* begin to gain political power (Lewis, 2011: 49-51).

The alignment of landowning elites and political power continued after Independence. National politicians and bureaucrats are often large landowners or depend upon rich landowning

peasants for political support (Hossain and Jones, 1983). Further, patron-client relations, aligned vertically along class lines, have shaped political outcomes (e.g. distribution of land), and denied marginalized people a political voice. Since 1987, national government policy has aimed to redistribute fallow (*kehas*) land¹ to landless households for agricultural purposes (known popularly as the ‘Land Law’). However, local elites tend to be in control of the land distribution process: local authorities overlook illegal possession of land by large landowners or consolidate their own rights to it (Devine, 2002; 2006). As one BKF activist explained:

When we attempt to establish land for the landless, the district authority gives a response to the *thana*² authority. They make a committee of social workers, development workers, local government members, and local political party members who decide if the claim can proceed. But the committee has no representatives from the movement. It is corrupt. They choose their own people to receive land (Interview, Kurigram District, Bangladesh, 2009).

Since the early 1990’s the government of Bangladesh has implemented structural adjustment programmes, including trade liberalization of agriculture, involving withdrawal of input subsidies, privatization of fertilizer distribution and seed production, and elimination of rural rationing and price subsidies (Murshid, no date). These have increased farmers’ indebtedness and landlessness as they struggle to secure the capital to pay for expensive agricultural inputs (see also Desmarais, 2007; Nally, 2011). Functional landlessness (i.e. ownership of less than 0.2 hectares) accounts for 69 per cent of the population (Hossain, 2009; Seabrook, 2013). Brought about through land grabs by rural elites, local government corruption, and environmentally-induced displacement, landlessness deterritorializes the poor.

Environmental risk exposure is increased for those with low incomes and less access to land (Brouwer et al 2007). While the country’s capacity to deal with cyclones has improved through the establishment of cyclone early warning and evacuation systems and cyclone shelters, leading to a decrease in fatalities, the capacity of existing cyclone shelters is woefully inadequate to accommodate all of the people in flood risk areas (Karim and Mimura, 2008; Paul and Dutt, 2010). Poor peasants’ vulnerability is also exacerbated by hazard risk perceptions generated by

influences of local culture, behaviour and coping strategies as well as inadequate land management policies and transport infrastructures (Chowdhury, 2009; Alam and Collins, 2010).³

Moreover, the Government of Bangladesh's Climate Change Strategy and Action Plan (BCCSAP) concerned with food security, adaptation, mitigation and comprehensive disaster management has been primarily shaped by bureaucrats; senior economists, non government organizations (NGOs)⁴ and international donors such as the U.K.'s Department for International Development (DFID). Those most vulnerable to climate change – the rural poor – were largely absent from the plan's formulation and little has as yet been initiated in terms of policy (Ayers and Huq, 2009; Raihan *et al*, 2010; Alam *et al*, 2011). Indeed, as a member of the BKF noted at the LVC international conference held in Jakarta, Indonesia in June 2013: "In Bangladesh we are adapting to climate change. We are dying". Hence, for social movements such as the BKF/BKS, the challenges of climate change fold into ongoing conflicts over access to key socio-environmental resources such as land as I will discuss below.

The politics of land occupation in Bangladesh

The Bangladesh Krishok Federation (BKF) was established in 1976, and the Bangladesh Kishani Sabha (Women Farmers' Association, BKS), the "female counterpart to the Krishok Federation" (<http://www.krishok.org>), in 1990. Affiliated to the Communist Party of Bangladesh, they are now estimated to have collectively 1,500,000 members (Interview, Dhaka, Bangladesh, 2011). Both social movements are national in scope of operations (their joint office being located in Dhaka), while focused around specific place-based occupations throughout Bangladesh. The BKF/BKS also participate in national networks of movements.⁵ Both the BKF and BKS have relatively hierarchical organizational structures and logics that ensure relative stability. These include what Nunes (2014) terms processes of formalization, i.e. internal rules for elections for a series of functional and hierarchical roles within the movement (e.g. president, general secretary, treasurer etc.); and consistency i.e. procedures for producing and enforcing decisions, such as national conferences (Interviews, 2002; 2004). In addition to national leaders based in Dhaka, the

movement is composed of local leaders in rural communities, activist cadre (see below) and the mass base of movement members (see Routledge and Cumbers, 2009). The BKF and BKS practice, in effect, horizontal collectivism (emphasizing common goals of land struggle and solidarity within the movement), and vertical collectivism (emphasizing peasant loyalty to the movement and adherence to the hierarchical relations that structure it) (Chirkov *et al*, 2003).

As Devine (2002; 2006) notes, poverty in Bangladesh is as much about the type and quality of relationships generated as it is about material deprivation. Participation in forms of collective action such as the BKF and BKS and the affective relationships fashioned through practices of movement solidarity, generate senses of belonging and identity that permeate struggles for peasant livelihoods, even as they generate relations of relative dependency of poor peasants upon movement leaderships to address conditions of landlessness through mass mobilization (see below).

Owing to ongoing landlessness and government inaction on implementing the Land Law, the BKF and BKS have, since 1992, organised landless people to occupy approximately 76,000 acres of *kebas* land distributed to more than 107,000 of the poorest men and women living in the countryside. Land occupation necessitates a politics of articulation that involves first, strategies of connectivity, appropriation and defence; second, attempts to reconfigure social relations; and third attempts to translocalise solidarity. It is to these processes that I now turn.

Strategizing occupation

The politics and practice of occupation in Bangladesh involves the creation, defence and reconfiguration of material territory understood as spaces of livelihood. The first phase comprises strategizing occupation, culminating in the moment of occupation, where peasants physically appropriate space. This requires practices of articulation utilizing key organizational structures and resources to generate communication and interaction in order to assemble and mobilise relations between peasants to occupy land. The BKF/BKS becomes active through relations and connections forged through political activity and which spatialise the movement

and ultimately territorialise it. This requires coordination and translocal networking between national and local movement leaders, key activist cadres, and the movement 'base' or mass membership.

First, possible sites to occupy are identified by BKF/BKS local leaders located in rural communities and communicated to the movement leadership in the BKF/BKS office in Dhaka either through mobile phone conversations or face-to-face meetings held in Dhaka. From my work in the BKF/BKS office (e.g. during the planning of the PGA (Asia) conference in 2004 and the Climate Caravan in 2011), I witnessed several visits of these local leaders whereby possible occupation sites were discussed and the logistics of occupation planned. For example, occupations have been identified and taken place in four islands in the Ganges river delta (occupied since 1992); disused railway land (occupied since 2004); swampland water bodies (occupied since 2012); and land inundated by salt water from cyclonic storm surges (since 1998) (Interview, Dhaka, Bangladesh, 2011; see **Figure 1**).

Second, the BKF/BKS deploy a cadre of young mobile activists who, along with national and local BKF/BKS leaders, generate and reinforce connections in the process of occupation, in order to territorialize the movement and its organizational logics in each process of occupation. Activist cadres originate from peasant villages, but rent accommodation in Dhaka where the BKF/BKS office is located, and are rarely able to visit their homes and families more than once or twice a year (Interviews, Dhaka, Bangladesh, 2009, 2011). As the opening passage of this article attests, they are frequently moving from village to village, generating connections and building relations between peasants and the movement enabling the BKF/BKS to expand membership over time and space (Baletti et al, 2008), and providing ideological coherence to mobilization meetings in rural communities. Their mobility – in contrast to the relatively sedentary life of peasant farmers – is a function of their training as key organizers: each activist cadre learns political organizing skills; English, and computing in a six month programme organized by the BKF/BKS (Interviews, Dhaka, Bangladesh, 2009). BKF/BKS leaders and

cadres nurture the capacity to resist of landless peasants by establishing a coordination committee who mobilize resources (people, skills, finances⁶), grievances associated with landlessness, and the political opportunities provided by the Land Law to shape the 'spatial imaginaries' of peasants: that land is available and they are legally entitled to occupy it (see Wolford, 2004). Activist cadres nurture strong ties between people (such as trust and interpretive frames) through ongoing place-based face-to-face meetings with communities to enable the mobilization of resources and people to take the physical risks of engaging in land occupations (Nicholls, 2009; Wills, 2013).

The organization of the meetings generates particular relational dynamics that reflect the hierarchically structured character of the movement. For example, in the land occupation organising meetings that I have attended during the past twelve years, the process of mass meetings make use of a particular physical and symbolic organization of space - what Zibechi (2012) terms the 'table'. The focal point of the meeting is a physical table at which leaders who organize the meeting sit separated from the mass membership of the movement who are seated at physically lower level (usually on the ground, or on seats) and who face the leaders and key activist cadre. The peasants who comprise the mass base of the BKF/BKS tend to speak only when the table authorizes them to do so. Such practices reflect traditional Communist organizational structures and is a response in part to the challenges faced by movement organizing in Bangladesh: most peasants are poorly educated, geographically dispersed, and poorly resourced.

At such meetings, peasants are emotionally moved to act by local leaders and activist cadres through the generation and mobilization of individual and collective senses of injustice, anger, desperation and hope. Emotions and affective relations generated through the process of organising can be mobilised to produce political effects (Bosco, 2007; Hemmings, 2012; Pulido, 2003; Routledge, 2012), as noted by a peasant activist involved in a BKF organized occupation of a body of water and the adjacent land:

The local government has been trying to privatize this commonly owned resource and then allow local elites to colonise it. Cadres from the BKF and BKS released young fish into the water body so that the local poor could fish there. However the government has attempted to claim it is illegal for locals to use and fish these common waters. They have issued false documents and tenders to local elites in exchange for bribes in order to colonise these resources. This made people very angry. That is why we occupy this water body (peasant testimony, Kurigram district, Bangladesh, 2011).

Third, the process of occupation requires an initial politics of intense mobility: the physical assembly and movement of peasants *en masse* to secure material territory. In the moment of occupation, armed only with their few belongings, peasant families act like a ‘swarm’ territorializing space by weight of numbers (Ross, 1988; Routledge, 1996). From an initial mobilization meeting with a landless community to the physical act of occupation takes between six to twelve months (Interview, Dhaka, Bangladesh, 2009). After the physical act of occupation, the necessities of maintaining the occupation and securing livelihoods necessitate an engagement with the politics of place. The material resources appropriated by peasants are sought after by rural elites, and as a result land occupation faces a counter-movement as peasants are confronted by the potential of violence and harassment from wealthy landowners and their private armies as well as corrupt district officials from the moment of occupation: “[P]easant activists are attacked, beaten, burned, jailed, and their homes are burned. That is the reality that we face” (Interview, BKF activist, Rangpur District, Bangladesh, 2009).⁷ As a result the BKF/BKS develop necessary organizing structures drawing on capacities for resourcefulness, particularly medical and legal knowledges and skills:

For a successful land occupation, the movement needs a strong occupation committee, whose leaders can withstand attacks by the landlords’ *goondas*⁸; a strong mass mobilization; a medical team who can provide medical treatment to those who suffer physical attacks; and a legal team to fight the legal cases brought by landlords in the local courts in an attempt to stop the occupation (Interview, Dinajpur District, Bangladesh, 2009).

Fourth, to resist physical assault, the occupation must be defended. Peasants arm themselves with brooms and chilli powder and arrange signal systems to warn the community of impending attacks (Routledge, 2008). The occupiers establish flag signals for communication relays. During the night, an attack is signaled by a hurricane lamp on top of bamboo pole. During the day, a

white flag signals a small problem, while a red flag signals a *goonda* attack (Interview, Charhadi, Bangladesh, 2002). The BKF/BKS have also organized the simultaneous occupation of five islands in order to spread landlord and *goonda* resources thinly across multiple locations (Interview, Satkhira district, Bangladesh 2011). The ‘moment’ of land occupation provides the movement with a public presence and helps the development of solidarity between landless peasants (see Wolford, 2004; Baletti et al, 2008). Successful defence of the occupation enables peasants to commence the process of reconfiguring space and power relations; i.e. the movement from a space of occupation to a space of livelihood to which I now turn.

Reconfiguring social relations

Occupation begins with the appropriation of land and the associated material resources.⁹ As Zibechi (2012) argues social movements embody the capacity of the poorest of society to *move*, attempting to change social relations, creating discontinuities in iniquitous land relations and articulating alternative agricultural ideas through particular farming practices. The process of territorialization is an attempt to create spaces of livelihood. It is a placed politics wherein logistics of where to sleep, eat, wash and defecate precede the construction of homes, the growing crops (e.g. rice, vegetables, pulses and fruits) and the sheltering of animals (primarily cows) (Interviews, Barguna District, 2009; Bogura District, Bangladesh, 2011).

While the BKF and BKS seed land occupation through the collective mobilisation of peasants, day to day securing of livelihoods depends on peasant farmer knowledge and collective activity. However, land occupation is precarious. In addition to the threat of attack, the initial process of occupation is difficult because of the lack of material resources of poor peasants. Through using membership fees, the BKF provides initial support, as a local leader noted:

Then we occupy the land. We build makeshift shelters for the occupying families, and provide food relief until the peasants can sow *padi* (rice). The peasants must drink river water, and many get sick, until we have dug tube wells (Interview, Barguna District, Bangladesh, 2009).

In each of the occupations I have visited (see Figure 1), everyday life has been an ongoing struggle against dispossession by landlords and the vagaries of the weather, and to fashion sustainable livelihoods under conditions of relative poverty. In a visit to the occupied island of Charhadi in 2002, a BKS activist commented:

On some islands, people have been dispossessed of their land by landlords from the mainland...[D]espite successfully remaining on the island for ten years, people still have no education or health care, and no flood shelters for their cattle when the river floods during the Monsoon. Since the occupation nearly one hundred, mostly children, have died (quoted in Routledge, 2008: 208).

However, the processes of territorialization attest to the process of ‘societies in movement’ in that economic and political power *begins* to be dispersed away from the state and landowning elites towards landless peasants, and is indicative of attempts to obtain social wealth and collectively organise social (re)production through antagonistic politics that directly challenge resource dispossessions of the poor (Harvey, 2003; Zibechi, 2010, 2012; Routledge, 2011).

Through the process of occupation peasants spatialise the struggle for land and territorialize the BKF/BKS. This forms part of a movement against the interests of agrarian elites and the state, in favour of the production and reproduction of family labour and towards attempts to change market-led agrarian policies. Further, land occupation represents an attempt to adapt to the challenges faced by climate change: “occupation is our response to climate change, since we cannot rely on the government to help the poor adapt” (Interview with BKF activist, Kathmandu, Nepal, 2012).

As part of this challenge, the BKF/BKS argue for the importance of food sovereignty practices as noted by the President of the BKF at an LVC South Asian regional Conference held in Dhaka in 2008:

Food sovereignty means the people’s right to produce and consume culturally appropriate and accepted healthy and adequate food and their right to define their own food and agriculture policy... It prioritizes the local and national economy, peasants and family farm based agriculture, artisan style fishing, pastoralist-led grazing and food production, distribution and consumption based on environmental, social and economic sustainability (Badrul Alam, *The Struggle*, October, 2008: 4).

The reconfiguration of power relations that food sovereignty promises is potentially an important force of momentum for social movements occupying land. While definitions of food sovereignty vary between organizations and activist networks, have changed over time, and contain inconsistencies, common themes have emerged such as direct peasant participation in agrarian reform, that includes peasant control over territory, biodiversity (commons) and means of (food) production. Food sovereignty farming practices attempt to repair the dynamic and interdependent process that links society to nature through labour, that has been undermined by the exploitation of socio-nature through capitalist agriculture (Wittman, 2009), and enable peasant communities to both mitigate, and adapt to, the effects of climate change, because of the biological resistance of crops, recovery capacity of land and the interdependent social dynamics between peasants (Windfuhr and Jonsen, 2005; La Via Campesina, 2009; Patel, 2009; Wittman, 2009; Altieri, 2010; Rosset *et al.*, 2011).

Food sovereignty ideas and practices circulate through space – for example through networks such as LVC to which BKF/BKS belong - but require consolidation in depth in order to embed them in peasant farming practices (Desmarais, 2007). Moreover, there are frequently socio-economic and cultural constraints vitiating against the adoption of food sovereignty such as the integration of peasant lives with wider monetized economic activities and changing values and knowledge relating to traditional agriculture (Watts, 1983; Byres, 2004; Bernstein, 2009; Boyer, 2010; Louis, 2012; Trauger, 2014).¹⁰

Such processes cast into sharp relief the difficulties faced by social movement struggles to constitute territories differently than those dominated by capital or state interests, the key dynamic behind Zibechi's (2010; 2012) notion of 'societies in movement'. The politics of place – in particular the precariousness of life in the land occupation sites - necessitates the securing of

peasants' livelihoods and these require articulation with the state and capital. As Bohm *et al.* (2010) argue, while attempts to fashion political autonomy struggle against capital accumulation and state and development practices, they nevertheless articulate with them (see also Baletti *et al.*, 2008). Indeed, food sovereignty has yet to be widely practiced in sites of occupation in Bangladesh. This is because, the degree of resourcefulness in peasant communities *after* occupation has taken place are at times limited. Existing societal structures and relations constrain the ability of peasants to exercise agency. For example, the precariousness of peasant livelihoods necessitate an articulation with capital relations in the form of agricultural input markets and credit. Through lack of funds, some BKF/BKS peasants must take loans from local landlords and moneylenders to buy livestock and tools to cultivate the land, which is then repaid in *padi* (Interview, Ganges delta, Bangladesh, 2002). One peasant farmer put it thus: "as crops fail, we need to take out loans and get into debt. We have lack of land, money and recognition" (Interview, Rangpur District, Bangladesh, 2011). Such vulnerabilities are further exacerbated by extreme weather events. In Satkhira district where 12,000 families have occupied land since 1998, flooding caused by Cyclone Aila in 2009 inundated the land with salt water, necessitating shrimp cultivation as a means of peasant livelihood. However, such cultivation is dependent upon private capital:

The shrimp cultivation is controlled by a Bangladeshi company that imports shrimp fry from Thailand, Malaysia and Singapore. The community buys fry from the company, grows their shrimp and then sells back to company for export. The villages can only consume 'grade fail' shrimp and the shrimp often get viruses. The peasants occupy the land but the company colonizes the economy (Interview, Satkhira District, Bangladesh, 2011).

Further, land occupation also necessitates engagement with the state whether in, against, or beyond it (Holloway, 2010; Wright, 2010; Zibechi, 2010). This is because the possibilities for social transformation and empowerment promised by democracy are always kept open by what

Michael Taussig (1997) terms the ‘magic of the state’ (see also Das, 2007; Hall *et al*, 2011). This is constituted in Bangladesh, for example, in the Land Law, and materialised through the politics of occupation in different ways that impact movement capacities to secure political recognition.

First, BKF/BKS leaders hold the Bangladesh government to account over its non-implementation of the Land Law and through the occupation of *kbas* land, in effect reterritorialize the authority of the state in the sites of occupation. Occupying the material resource of land and attempting to transform it through territorialization generates a process of political recognition: by occupying space, peasants disturb the given political-economic order to gain visibility. The insecurities of peasant livelihoods mean that a primary concern of peasant occupiers is legal recognition through the granting of permanent land titles. In workshops conducted during the Climate Caravan, peasants voiced their primary concerns as securing livelihoods through access to land and other key resources, and government support and legal recognition. However, this important element of resourcefulness continues to elude peasant occupiers as one peasant farmer noted: “how can we tolerate that we are working on *kbas* land but still we have no permanent settlement? We need the government to accept our occupation and provide us with land titles” (Interview, Rangpur District, Bangladesh, 2011).

Second, as noted earlier, landlords bring criminal charges against peasants in their attempts to gain control of *kbas* land. As a result, the BKF/BKS have deployed technical skills and knowledge by forming a legal team to challenge these criminal charges in the courts. By invoking the Land Law, by demanding land titles and recognition from the state, and by engaging with, and thus legitimizing the legal system, occupations also make space open to be governable (Bryan, 2012).

Third, the BKF/BKS leadership also make demands on the Bangladesh government to adopt food sovereignty as an integral part of its national agricultural policy, as one activist noted: “we are also working to pressure the Ministry of Agriculture and the Ministry of the Environment to take a clear position on climate change and incorporate food sovereignty into

the National agricultural policy” (Interview, BKF activist, Dhaka, Bangladesh, 2009). The relationship between the BKF leadership and the state is also one that moves beyond the politics of demands to one of potential recognition, attested to by the invitation to the President of the BKF by the Government of Bangladesh to participate in its delegation to the UNFCCC climate negotiations in Durban, South Africa in 2011. Although this was seen as a potentially useful way to engage with and potentially influence state policies on climate change, the BKF President was prevented from doing so by his participation in the Climate Caravan.¹¹

This is indicative of how different actors and their respective positionalities in the movement (particularly leaders and peasant occupiers) articulate with the state in different ways (Wolford, 2010). While movement leaders are recognized by the state to participate in UN climate talks, peasants still await legal recognition of their land occupations. Further, the leadership are able to arrange meetings with government officials (at local and national levels, whereas this is far more difficult – if not impossible - for poor peasants. For example, during several of my visits to Bangladesh, I have attended movement meetings with rural government officials organized by the BKF leadership. Whether speaking in Bengali or English, it has only been the leaders who have spoken in such meetings. Indeed, peasants depend upon well-educated leaders to represent them. Referring to how the BKF President was the organizational lynchpin of the movement, one peasant activist likened him to the sun and the mass base of the BKF to the moon: “Without the sun the moon has no light. We need to build up the moon” (Interview, Dinajpur, Bangladesh, 2009).

This raises the question of how we might understand the dispersal of power associated with the notion of ‘societies in movement’ *within* social movements. Chirkov *et al* (2003) argue that there is frequently a necessary relation between between autonomy – peasants’ ability to act in accordance with their interests – and dependence (peasants’ reliance upon movement leadership structures). They argue that not only can both co-exist the latter can empower the former. As I have shown, hierarchical organizational structures and logics within the BKF and

BKS generate relative stability, formalization and consistency. While peasants depend upon the BKF/BKS national and local leaders and cadres to organize them to carry out land occupations, this allows them to move from relations of relative disempowerment (being landless and disorganised) to those of greater agency (occupying land and beginning to change the character of social relations with the state (see also Devine, 2006).

However, gender inequalities persist in Bangladesh, manifested in women's triple labour (as workers, mothers and activists); restrictions on women's physical and social mobility; females' poor access to education and training; and women's lack of participation in political life through circumscribed decision-making powers (e.g. Agarwal, 1994; Datta, 2007; Sultana, 2009a; 2009b; Routledge, forthcoming [b]). BKS activists pose ideological challenges to the inequalities of resource distribution and control, and authority (of male family members) attesting to an ongoing process of change. Hence, the BKS' list of demands include the abolition of the 'present master-slave relationship between men and women' which would include freeing women from 'domestic slavery' and 'economic slavery...of married life of women through the participation of both men and women in social production' and 'the participation of women in all spheres of social...life' (BKF, BKS and LVC 2011: 17-18). However, in territories of occupation, women's action is constrained by everyday social relations, as one peasant woman noted: "we need greater decision-making power amongst village women so we can participate more in our community" (Interview, Kurigram district, Bangladesh, 2011). The inequality of gendered relations constrains women's agency within land occupations, and the extent to which, for women, power is dispersed.

Territorializing translocal solidarities

The BKF and BKS participate in a variety of networks that are based upon 'maps of grievance' (Featherstone, 2003) that developed in response to the threats posed to peasant livelihoods by neoliberal globalisation. These include LVC, the Asia Peasants Coalition, the South Asia Peasants Coalition, and the People's Coalition on Food Sovereignty and the Asian Social Forum and

World Social Forum processes (Interviews, Dhaka, Bangladesh 2009).¹² This enables the BKF and BKS to draw upon a more extensive set of material resources, knowledge, skills and organizational structures.

Land occupations connect with and generate relations with other social movement struggles within and beyond Bangladesh, which in turn produce political activity that territorializes translocal connections. The BKF/BKS combine various practices of struggle e.g. demonstrations; rallies; caravans to territorialise and translocalise themselves in multiple sites and place ongoing pressure upon governments officials. An action in one place has the potential to empower an action in another place, and such practices of struggle enable the landless peasants to meet each other and forge and reinforce connections, further territorializing land struggles (Davies, 2012).

For example, in 2011, the BKF/BKS in alliance with LVC devised and organized a Climate Caravan to educate and mobilise vulnerable peasant communities engaged in land occupations about food sovereignty and the effects of climate change, and facilitate networking connections in the form of movement-to-movement communication, sharing of experiences and strategies, and in so doing deepen and extend solidarity networks of grassroots movements in South Asia. The Climate Caravan embodied a politics of mobility generating place-based encounters and connections between differentially positioned activists. The Caravan comprised three buses containing eighty activists: fifty-five BKF and BKS activists from various districts from Bangladesh, and twenty five activists – including a Maoist member of the Nepali government - from various grassroots movements and groups beyond Bangladesh¹³ meeting with BKF/BKS-organised peasant and indigenous communities in eighteen villages in twelve districts of Northern and Southern Bangladesh, involving a total of approximately three thousand peasant farmers.

Activist cadres of the BKF and BKS participated with local movement leaders in mobilizing land occupation communities to host the Caravan, organizing the food to be eaten on

the Caravan and accommodation for the participants prior to the Caravan, and conducting ongoing logistical support during the Caravan (Interviews, Dhaka, Bangladesh, 2011). For example, during The Caravan I witnessed cadres cooking food for Caravan participants, arranging sleeping quarters and rigging up electricity connections.

Particular relational encounters fashioned through the political activities of the Caravan such as workshops, seminars and rallies (but also informal encounters such as during meals and travel on the buses), promoted dialogue mutual learning, trust, and the sharing of informational resources (Barvosa-Carter, 2001). They produced connections through which movement ideas could be diffused or transmitted, regarding grievances, goals of social change, organizational development, strategic assessment, etc. (Snow and Benford, 1999). Through such communication, cooperation and coordination with peasant communities the BKF/BKS seek to territorialise the movement both within and beyond the immediate spaces of a particular occupation. Here, the practice of solidarity is at once specific enough to mobilise and empower at specific territories of occupation, and fluid enough to generate common ground between communities nationally and internationally (Katz, 2001). Clearly differential powers and mobilities are involved in such encounters. There are pronounced differences in physical mobility across space and access to resources (e.g. information, education, time, money, technology) between participants. Poor land occupying peasants are less resourced than movement activists crossing national borders to participate on the Caravan, national BKF/BKS leaders based in Dhaka, and activist cadres. Some circulate more freely and extensively than others, and are differentially empowered, and these are more than just relational effects that accrue to networking dynamics. There are specific causes of such power relations that reflect class and caste hierarchies within South Asian societies (see Routledge, 2008).

The Climate Caravan acted to inform, consolidate and extend territories of occupation in different ways. First, the connections forged as a result of it developed the organizational strength of the BKF/BKS through the increased cohesion between movement members from

different districts in the country (Interview, Dhaka, Bangladesh, 2011). This was facilitated through local leaders and some peasant farmers from different Northern territories of occupation joining the Caravan and in so doing meeting activists from other Southern territories of occupation, and discussing their experiences during the Caravan's events. As one BKF activist commented: "[T]he Caravan was able to make a bridge between people in the North and South...to facilitate greater mutual understanding" (Interview, Barisal District, 2011).

Second, the participation of activists from farmers' movements from India, Nepal, Sri Lanka, Pakistan and the Philippines on the Caravan provided an opportunity for peasants to share experiences from their different movements' struggles and national contexts; meet with Bangladeshi peasants; explore how they might create bi-lateral campaigns with the BKF/BKS; fashion joint campaigns with other movements; and take their experiences back to their own countries and struggles (Interviews, North and South Bangladesh, 2011). Such connections enabled the translocal diffusion (of ideas, tactics, strategies etc.) between different sites and social actors, bridging cultural and geographic divides (Bandy and Smith, 2005), and facilitated solidarity between movements as an Indian activist commented:

We have formed relationships, deepened networking ties, and we have begun to plan future actions together. I think it was encouraging for communities to see an international presence, and that others care about the problems of people in Bangladesh and want to learn from them. This is solidarity (Interview, Satkhira District, 2011).

Further, the connections fashioned through the political activities of the Caravan can have impacts on the politics in particular places in productive ways. For example, one local BKS leader in a territory of occupation visited by the Caravan had previously experienced violence from police and harassment from local government officials. The attendance of a local government official in her village during a Caravan event enabled her to debate with that official from a position of relative empowerment, owing to the presence of both national movement leaders and activists (including a member of parliament) from other countries. The BKS activist informed a BKF national leader that after the Caravan had left the village she was contacted by the official

who apologized for the ‘problems’ she had faced in the past and suggested that they work together in the future (personal communication, Kurigram District, Bangladesh, 2011).

However, the efficacy of movement articulatory politics depends particularly on how effectively alliances are territorialized through particular placed struggles (Swyngedouw, 2004a; Routledge *et al*, 2007; Wills, 2013). The politics of articulation is always situated, partial and constantly reworked (Featherstone, 2011), not least owing to difficulties of generating connections necessary to initiate political activity. ‘Societies in movement’ are comprised of differentially connected (and resourced) activists.

First, the resources, time and coordination required for each new act of occupation mean that connectivity between territories of occupation, beyond the visits of local peasant leaders to the BKF/BKS office in Dhaka, or movement cadres to peasant communities, can be intermittent. Further, the poor quality of the road infrastructure, infrequent bus transport, and Monsoon weather (which can flood roads making them impassable) makes the work of fashioning of connections between movement actors difficult and time consuming. Activist cadres and local leaders use mobile phones to maintain information flows and intra-movement connections, but such means of communication cannot fully compensate for the critical moments of connection and interactivity that only face to face meetings can generate.

Hence *placed* practices of political articulation between territories of occupation such as movement meetings, rallies and demonstrations, and initiatives such as the Climate Caravan become critical moments of translocal connection between territories of occupation and between different social movements (Routledge, 2008). The latter require considerable planning, resources and coordination and are therefore sporadic.¹⁴ Moreover, connectivity is unevenly experienced in the movement. BKF/BKS leaders are far more connected to information flows (e.g. concerning discussions of food sovereignty in international and national conferences and list-serves) and to activists in other movements than local leaders and land occupying peasants (see Routledge and

Cumbers, 2009). This was why increasing awareness about food sovereignty at village level was a key purpose of the Climate Caravan (Interview, Dhaka, Bangladesh, 2009).

Second, the precariousness of peasant livelihoods in territories of occupation means that peasants often have little time to participate in political activity. Concerning the difficulties of balancing work and activism one peasant woman said: “land occupation activities are important but they take time away from our work activities, we cannot always participate” (Interview Kurigram District, Bangladesh, 2011). Moreover, the character of the connections fashioned between activists in face-to-face encounters can be tenuous, because the movement suffers an ongoing attrition of activist cadres because they only receive a modest stipend for their organizing work and many have families to support:

Some are recruited by NGOs. Others are co-opted through bribes and threats to act as organisers for political parties. Yet others get to the stage where they decide to follow a career or look after their family (Interview, Kurigram District, Bangladesh, 2009).

As a result, trust relations developed over time between particular activists nationally and internationally can be undermined and need to be rebuilt. While connectivity and information flows are enabled by movement structures and organizational practices these remain time consuming, intermittent, and unevenly experienced.

Having discussed the strategies of land occupation, and attempts to reconfigure social relations, and territorialize translocal solidarities, I now propose the notion of territorializing movement to conceptualise the politics of land occupation in Bangladesh.

Territorializing movement

Social movements actuate, reproduce and extend themselves through the process of territorialization: through connections forged through political activity within territories of occupation and translocally between different territories of occupation and between different social movements within networked alliances. As such, territorializing movement is a process of becoming (see Fernandes, 2005) entailing a spatial politics of articulation wherein social

movement structures resources, capacities, relations and organizational dynamics facilitate processes of land occupation.

First, territorializing movement entails ‘a capacity to resist’ (Caygill, 2013): political strategies of resourcefulness (MacKinnon and Derickson, 2012) that include identifying, planning, actively occupying and defending space, wherein material resources (land, people), knowledges, skills and emotions are mobilized and deployed. This ‘moment of occupation’ necessitates a politics of visibility – an embodied space of appearance (Butler, 2011) – and the development of a “generative antagonism” to defend forms of life, organization and social reproduction (Harney and Moten, 2013: 17). Occupying strategies deploy persistent organizational structures and logics, and different activist positionalities (national and local movement leaders, activist cadres, and peasant farmers) that are critical in enabling the fashioning of connections necessary for undertaking political activity. Differently empowered actors (e.g. concerning levels of connectivity and resourcefulness act to bring territory into existence under specific spatial contexts by occupying land, islands and water bodies. Social movements will enact particular and intense configurations of territorialized and deterritorialized movement according to the specific spatial, political, cultural, and strategic circumstances in which they are located (Routledge, 1996). The strategies and tactics of occupying and defending space constitute “a ceaselessly moving sea of phenomena” (Luxemburg, 1970: 182) manifested by the active forces of peasant struggle. The organizational logics necessary for territorializing movement are autopoietic processes that respond dynamically to a constantly changing environment (Caygill, 2013). Territorializing movement includes a reciprocal counter movement by opposing forces since peasants must negotiate attempted reterritorializations of occupied land by rural elites (e.g. landlord armies).

Second, territorializing movement constitutes a “tactical engagement” with hegemonic understandings of space (Bryan, 2012: 221; see also Wainwright, 2008), potentially giving rise to ‘overlapping or alternative territories’ (Agnew and Oslender, 2013) as social movements

challenge state-centric notions of sovereignty, what Saskia Sassen (2013: 38) terms the “strong territorial moment” of struggle. Once occupied, the process of territorialization, which constitutes attempts to fashion spaces of livelihood, is necessarily a placed politics. Occupation promises the reconfiguration of physical space (see Dikeç, 2001) in order to articulate emergent forms of sovereignty (e.g. concerning food production) and transform social relations of power and reproduction (see Escobar, 2008; Federici, 2010; 2012; Zibechi, 2010; 2012). However, the “assembling of relations through political activity” (Featherstone, 2011:141) is contested and partial. Rather than configuring territories in completely new ways, the generative capacities of ‘societies in movement’ remain ‘struggles in progress’. Power *tends* to be dispersed away from the state and capital towards landless peasants in the process of occupation. However, the precarity of peasant livelihoods in territories of occupation necessitates a range of negotiated relationships between movement members, the state and capital that limit the extent of the dispersal of political and economic power and the political recognition of land occupation (see also Baletti et al, 2008). Hierarchical organizational structures within the BKF/BKS facilitate land occupation in Bangladesh and contribute to movement stability, formalization and consistency (Nunes, 2014). These generate relations of dependency between landless peasants and the movement leadership that also enable peasant agency (Chirkov *et al*, 2003). However, the persistence of unequal gender relations within communities attests to the ongoing struggles to disperse power within social movement relations.

Third, processes of land occupation produce territorialized movement and this practice nurtures translocal relations both within occupied spaces, between occupied spaces and other sites of struggle, and between other territorializing movements. Occupations not only involve processes of territorialization in particular places, they also form part of a networked and translocal politics of extension concerning land reform, neoliberalising agriculture and climate change that involve the articulation of common ground with other struggles both within Bangladesh and beyond it. Such solidarities are shaped through the ongoing contestation of

spatially stretched power relations and the construction and defence of particular territories (Featherstone, 2012). They are constructed through movement structures and articulatory processes of relationality and commonality between differently resourced and connected activists, diverse place-based occupations and other struggles that share common ground. Practices of solidarity-building configure territory in particular ways because the connections necessary for the forging of a politics of alliance are grounded in place- and face-to-face based moments of articulation and encounter which stress relationality, connectivity and commonality (Rai, 2003; Juris, 2008; Routledge and Cumbers, 2009; Featherstone 2011; 2012). However, the connections fashioned through placed activities can be intermittent and unevenly experienced in the prosecution of contentious politics. This brings me to some final thoughts on the process of social change.

Territorializing movement and social change

Raul Zibechi's (2012) notion of 'societies in movement' has relevance to debates on the relational and processual character of contentious politics; the politics of autonomy; and the character of organizational logics within social movements and networks. The generative practices of occupation constitute efforts by the BKF/BKS to disperse power from government officials and landowning elites towards peasants and peasant movements through processes of communication, connection, cooperation and struggle. Such a process involves the creation, defence and reconfiguration of material territory. In so doing, the processes of territorializing movement attempt to fashion socio-ecological transformations in the lives of poor, landless peasants. This involves: relational political strategies of occupation that deploy movement structures and capacities and differently positioned, resourced and connected activists; a placed politics that attempts the reconfiguration of social relations; and a translocal and unevenly networked politics grounded in place- and face-to-face based moments of articulation.

The contradictions, dynamics and problems associated with 'societies in movement' and the dispersal of power in Bangladesh require incorporating structural and relational approaches

to understanding collective action (e.g. Nicholls, 2009; Nicholls, Miller and Beaumont, 2013). Analysis of the spatial practices of articulation that comprise ‘territorializing movement’ necessitates a consideration of the organizational structures and practices that enable land occupation to take place, including a social movement’s ‘resourcefulness’ (MacKinnon and Derickson, 2012): its capacity to deploy material resources, skills and knowledges, and secure political recognition for the landless. These are crucial in creating and maintaining the socio-material relations necessary for political activity to be prosecuted. Attention to organizational logics and resourcefulness provides insights into work on assemblage concerning who performs the work of fashioning political connections (Davies, 2012) and the character of those connections.

Occupation reframes space politically through repossessions of land by the poor (Wolford, 2004), and territory is always being made and remade through processes of de/reterritorialization; through occupations and displacements, “a type of ‘being in-between’” (Haesbaert, 2013: 155) that requires paying attention to the extent and character of the dispersal of power associated with societies in movement. Differential powers are generated in, by and through processes of land occupation.

As peasants negotiate the vulnerabilities associated with landlessness and the violence that attends land struggles, social movements’ ‘capacities to move’ are problematized in a range of ways that have implications for the process of social change. While land is occupied, and while such occupation does transform peasant lives in that they have access to a range of ecological resources otherwise denied them, the attendant insecurities of peasant life mean that land titles, political recognition, climate change and security from debt remain the ongoing priorities for peasants. Land occupation realities mean that the generative capacities of ‘movement’ are compelled to articulate with capital and the state even as they attempt to challenge and transform existing geometries of power.

For activists in the BKF/BKS and LVC more generally, struggles over access to, occupation and use of resources (land, water, forests etc.) – processes of territorializing movement - represent the key terrain of contentious politics in the world today (Interviews, Jakarta, Indonesia, 2013) particularly as peasant livelihoods are increasingly threatened with the impacts of climate change. Indeed, the appropriation of resources can constitute an adaptive response to climate change born of necessity.

In an era of resource dispossessions wherein a marketized, global ‘new ecology of rule’ driven by financial and development institutions will place the burden of climate change adaptation and survival even further upon the backs of the poor (Watts, 2013: 1xxx-1xxxii), there are serious implications for the politics of climate justice. The economic and environmental crisis is precisely that which commodifies all social relations and resources including those resources (water, land, education, health) that, because people’s survival depends on them, should be considered human rights (Sader, 2011). Hence the decommodification of social relations implied by land occupations, as an example of the practice of climate justice, requires thinking through practices of resource sovereignty – concerned with issues of self-determination; the material access, use and control of particular resources; and the potential of utilizing existing forms of collective organization for more socially and ecologically just purposes (Martinez-Alier *et al.*, 2014). This is particularly important in the context of resource depletion; and the health, economic and social inequalities; and environmental injustices associated with accumulation by dispossession (Harvey, 2003). This raises key questions concerning how to remediate the conditions that produce the uneven capacity to imagine and engender alternative futures.

The politics of dispersing power is important in this era of predatory capital and quiescent states. The terrain of political possibility includes a range of political strategies that are ‘in, against and beyond’ that depending upon context, might entail direct confrontation with, autonomy from, and at times engagement with the state in so far as the dispossessed are politically empowered and economically resourced (Wright, 2010; Cumbers, 2012). An

unequivocal and ‘generative antagonism’ to capital should be maintained. Given that economically and environmentally just transformations require broad, democratic participation, questions of how to engender the conditions in which democratic visions can emerge come to the fore (Derickson and Routledge 2014). In no small part this necessitates questions of how social movement forces might be consolidated in order to organize new forms of contentious action and generate alternative forms of social, economic and political power. Land/food resources and relations are key to such processes of consolidation. The capacities of social movements to ‘territorialize movement’ will be a critical dimension of livelihood conflicts in the coming decades.

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Endnotes

¹ *Khas* land is defined as that which is: owned by the government; accredited from seas and rivers; vested in government ceiling surpluses; purchased by the government in auction sales; surrendered, abandoned or confiscated (Momen, discussed in Devine, 2002).

² District

³ Cyclone Sidr, in 2007, caused 3500 deaths (Karim and Mimura, 2008).

⁴ E.g. Equity and Justice Working Group coalition, and the Oxfam-led Campaign for Sustainable Rural Livelihood

⁵ For example, in Bangladesh the BKF/BKS are members of the *Aabt Sangathan* (the Eight Organizations) that includes the Floating Labour Union; the Floating Women's Labour Union; the Bangladesh *Adivasi Samiti* (indigenous committee); the Rural Intellectual Front; the *Ganasaya* Cultural Centre; and the Revolutionary Youth Association. The total membership is now close to two million members (Interviews, Dhaka, 2004; 2009)

⁶ Each peasant pays a one Taka (0.75 pence) membership fee to the movement that helps finance land occupations (Interview, Dhaka, Bangladesh, 2009).

⁷ For example, in October 2012, a key local activist leader of the BKF in northern Bangladesh was murdered by a suspected 'hired hand' of local elites (personal communication October, 2012).

⁸ Hired thugs

⁹ Discussions with BKF/BKS activists about occupations have frequently involved comments about material resources in addition to land, such as water, seeds, and housing (Interviews, Bangladesh 2009; 2011).

¹⁰ See also the [Special Issue: Global Agrarian Transformations Volume 2: Critical Perspectives on Food Sovereignty](#), *Journal of Peasant Studies*, 41, 6, 2014.

¹¹ Personal communication, Dhaka, Bangladesh, 2011.

¹² The BKF/BKS have participated in the Asian Food Sovereignty Climate Caravan (in 2004); in conferences on gender and globalization (in Dhaka, 2004), and food sovereignty and peasant rights (in Nepal and Bangladesh in 2007); and a LVC-organised conference in Dhaka, 2008 on climate change and food sovereignty (Interviews, Dhaka, Bangladesh, 2009).

¹³ Participation was from India (Andhra Pradesh Vyavasaya Vruthidarula Union; Karnataka State Farmer's Association; Institute for Motivating Self Employment), Nepal (All Nepal Peasants Federation; All Nepal Peasants' Federation (Revolutionary); All Nepal Women's Association; General Federation of Nepalese Trade Unions; Jagaran Nepal), Pakistan (Anjuman Muzareen Punjab [Tenants Association Punjab]), Sri Lanka (Movement for National Land and Agricultural Reform; National Socialist Party) and the Philippines (Kilusang Magbubukid ng Pilipinas [KMP, Peasant Movement of the Philippines]), as well as activists from La Via Campesina (South Asia); the U.K.; Germany, and Australia

¹⁴ For example, the follow-up to the 2011 Caravan took place in 2014.