RIGHTFUL RADICAL RESISTANCE: MASS MOBILIZATION AND LAND STRUGGLES IN INDIA AND BRAZIL*

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An examination of mass mobilizations to promote land rights of the landless and near-landless by Ekta Parishad in India and the Landless Rural Workers Movement (MST) in Brazil identifies a similar strategy of rightful radical resistance that incorporates key elements of rightful resistance but also transcends it. The comparable strategy is due to similarities in context: India and Brazil are semiperipheral countries with relatively high-capacity states and representative democratic political structures, but have inequitable distributions of agricultural land despite constitutional principles and laws that embody equitable land distributions. However, given the substantial variation across India and Brazil in culture, geography, and demography, the specific forms assumed by rightful radical resistance vary. This study contributes to the social movements and civil resistance literatures by explicating the strategic logic of the mass mobilizations, explaining similarities and differences across the two cases, and illustrating the potential of civil resistance for challenging the structural violence of land dispossession and inequality.

In rural and peri-urban areas across the globe conflicts over the use and distribution of land are intensifying. Population pressure and environmental degradation have contributed to an increase in the ratio of people to arable land and accumulation by dispossession as manifested through land grabs for factories, mining and industrial agriculture have alienated land from people (Borras and Franco 2012; Harvey 2003). In many places the “development state” has been transformed into a neoliberal “land broker state” that facilitates the dispossession of land from peasants and indigenous people and its transfer to capitalist and rentier classes (Levien 2011, 2013). Land alienation, of course, has been occurring for centuries, at least as far back as the enclosures of the commons in fifteenth century Britain and Ireland, a process analyzed by Karl Marx in his theory of primitive accumulation (1967 [1867]). Resistance to land alienation has been manifested through everyday forms of resistance (e.g., Scott 1985) and violent rebellion (e.g., Wolf 1969; Paige 1975). From the late twentieth century into the twenty-first, however, an increasing number of peasant and indigenous peoples’ movements have organized campaigns of civil (nonviolent) resistance to wage conflict. Instead of seeking to influence or control the state through elections or violence, the challenges remain autonomous from political parties and mobilize campaigns of civil resistance to generate pressure from outside of political institutions to affect change within institutional channels.

In the past few decades a substantial literature has developed on peasants, rural workers, indigenous people, and resistance with foci (some interrelated) on everyday forms of resistance (e.g., Scott 1985), collective identities and social movements (e.g., Escobar and Alvarez 1992), subaltern studies (e.g., Guha 1983), resistance to neoliberal globalization (e.g., Edelman

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1999; Vegara-Camus 2014), and transnational networks (e.g., Borras, Edelman, and Kay 2008). However, scholars of rural-based resistance have infrequently drawn from the literature on contentious politics (e.g., McAdam, Tarrow, and Tilly 2001) and even less frequently from the literature on civil resistance (e.g., Sharp 1973). One exception is the work of Kevin J. O’Brien and Lianjiang Li on rightful resistance against land dispossession, corruption, and unjust taxation in rural China that draws from the contentious politics literature (O’Brien 1996, 2013; O’Brien and Li 2006). In rightful resistance aggrieved citizens attempt to legitimize their protest against local government officials by overtly denouncing their violation of the central state’s laws, policies or rhetoric. Rightful resistance involves grassroots collective action that occurs outside of regulated political channels to promote change within institutional politics. In rightful resistance the legitimacy of laws and core values of the state are not challenged; instead the gap between central government directives and local policies is highlighted. These gaps are emphasized through framing processes that intensify mobilizing grievances and promote mobilization; but once framed, the gaps also provide a fulcrum for promoting change that may be leveraged through collective action that gains the attention of sympathetic political elites.

Here I focus on two social movement organizations that incorporate elements of rightful resistance in rural land struggles: the Landless Rural Workers Movement (Movimento dos Trabalhadores Rurais sem Terra; or MST) in Brazil and Ekta Parishad (Unity Forum) in India. As in China the challenges in India and Brazil are characterized by “reliance on established principles to anchor challenges,” “deployment of existing statutes and commitments when leveling charges,” “importance of allies, however uncertain, within officialdom,” and “combination of legal tactics with grassroots collective action” (O’Brien and Li 2006: 22-23). That is, the challenges in India and Brazil are rightful to the extent that they contrast existing constitutional principles and laws with conditions on the ground in their framing of grievances and leverage the gap through mass mobilization that draws the attention of elites. Moreover, the challenges in India and Brazil rely on allies within officialdom to press for change. In India officials within the Ministry of Rural Development and in Brazil officials within the Instituto Nacional de Colonização e Reforma Agrária (INCRA, the federal agency in charge of land reform) may at times act as influential allies. However, as in China, there is no certainty of official support. Finally, as in China, the challenges in India and Brazil rely on a combination of legal tactics and grassroots mobilization that may transgress the line of legality since reliance on solely institutional political procedures or legal protest is insufficient for closing the gap between state or central government policies or laws and their local non-implementation or violation.

However, the challenges in India and Brazil also differ from rightful resistance—or go beyond it—due to political opportunities afforded them in more democratic contexts. They have opportunities for organizing and mobilizing—as well as taking a more critical stance toward the state—that surpass opportunities normally available in authoritarian regimes. Whereas rightful resistance in China is primarily carried out at the local level with minimal networking across villages, the challenges in India and Brazil have scaled horizontally across geographic areas as well as vertically to regional, national and transnational levels. Whereas rightful resistance in China is episodic, the challenges in India and Brazil are sustained. Whereas rightful resistance in China stays well within the boundaries of the system and frames challenges in terms of promoting the policies of the central state, in India and Brazil the challenges are openly critical of the government’s biased implementation of the rule of law that privileges the landowning elite, while at the same time dependent upon the government to enforce the rule of law, distribute land, regularize land holdings, implement reform, and provide credit and technical support for agricultural production once land is attained. The challenges in India and Brazil are radical in the sense that their perspectives on development are counterhegemonic; they rely on transgressive nonviolent direct action in addition to more constrained actions; and in the context of traditionally authoritarian relations in rural India and Brazil and the marginalization of the landless and near landless, the claiming of democratic
Rightful Radical Resistance

I refer to the resistance in India and Brazil, which incorporates key elements of rightful resistance, but also goes well beyond it as rightful radical resistance. I use a comparative design and inductive analysis based on secondary sources to compare land rights campaigns of the two social movement organizations. The two cases were selected for comparison based on similarities: they are both land-rights social movement organizations that engage in sustained civil resistance against processes of land alienation in large, (representative) democratic, semiperipheral, postcolonial, relatively high-capacity states where there is a substantial population that depends on access to land for a dignified livelihood. A benefit of the design is that a systematic comparison of matched cases allows for an identification of similarities and differences in strategy and causal factors that account for the similarities and differences. However, the research design is limited. First, generalizations cannot be made beyond the two cases. The cases are biased in that they represent instances of sustained mobilization that have occurred over decades, thus telling us nothing about instances where rightful radical resistance was suppressed without sustained mobilization or instances where rightful radical resistance was transformed by the twin processes of institutionalization and radicalization. Second, the analysis is cast at the macro- and mesolevels of analysis. Thus, assumptions made about strategic thinking must be confirmed at the microlevel. Third, I rely primarily on secondary sources such that source bias and selectivity may impact the analysis.

I begin by briefly discussing the two social movement organizations and the contexts in which they operate and then focus on two methods of nonviolent action, the *padayatra* (extended foot march) and the *land occupation*, which are, respectively, the linchpins of the mass mobilization campaigns of Ekta Parishad and the MST. Drawing on insights from the literatures on civil resistance and social movements I identify common dynamics and conceptual equivalences in the strategies that recur across the two cases, while remaining attentive to variations in context that influence conceptions of struggle, forms of agency, and mechanisms of change. The study contributes to the social movements and civil resistance literatures by identifying a strategy of rightful radical resistance and specifying its strategic logic, explaining similarities in the strategy across the two cases in terms of the political and legal context, and explaining differences across the two cases in terms of the cultural and geographic context. I explain why institutionalization and radicalization have been averted and how the appropriate matching of ideologies and methods of action to the context has facilitated political traction.

**INDIA: EKTA PARISHAD**

Upon independence in 1947 India was characterized by several land tenure systems, with the most prominent being *zamindari* and *ryotwari* systems. Under the *zamindari* system, land is owned by a *zamindar* who leases it to tenants for cultivation and collects taxes from them for the state. Under the *ryotwari* system the cultivator is the owner (*ryot*) of the land and pays taxes directly to the state. Both systems were characterized by subinfeudation, i.e., repeated subleasing, and this was especially problematic in the *zamindari* system where in some cases there were up to 50 intermediaries between the cultivator and the ultimate landowner with each claiming rent. At independence approximately 68 percent of peasants were landless or nearly landless and working as tenant farmers or rural workers (Dantwala 1950: 239-240). Land reform undertaken after independence required states to enact laws consistent with national policy directives by abolishing the *zamindari* system and intermediaries, passing land ceiling acts and distributing the surplus to the landless, and tenancy reform to provide security to cultivators. Nevertheless, inequalities persisted as powerful landowners maintained or increased their landholdings and prevented reforms from being implemented (Saxena 2011).

In the decades following independence India adopted a developmentalist paradigm and with the support of the World Bank constructed large dams and adopted Green Revolution
technologies to facilitate industrial agriculture. Although raising agricultural output in some areas, the developmentalist paradigm also contributed to environmental degradation and the displacement of people, often without adequate compensation (Shiva 1992). In the early 1990s India transitioned toward neoliberal economic policies opening the countryside to the penetration of transnational agribusinesses that pressure state governments to eliminate land ceilings to facilitate the production of monoculture export commodities such as cotton and engage in aggressive marketing campaigns to promote the use of chemical pesticides and fertilizers and genetically modified organisms (GMOs) (Menon and Nigam 2007). Moreover, as urbanization and the expansion of offices and factories intensify, small farmers working on the periphery of urban zones are forcibly displaced from the land through eminent domain (Goldman 2011; Levien 2011). As a result of these processes and more, landlessness and land inequalities have increased in recent decades (Rawal 2008).

A substantial portion of the rural population is composed of landless or nearly landless *dalits*. Some *dalits* have small plots of land that they have cultivated for years or generations, however many lack official land titles making them vulnerable targets for dispossession. Landlessness has also intensified among *adivasis* despite regulations that prohibit the transfer of *adivasi* land to non-*adivasis*. Timber and mining operations and the encroachment of industrial agriculture and wildlife preserves have displaced *adivasis* from forestland, and typically they are not adequately compensated, if at all. As a result of these processes and more, the highest levels of poverty in India are in rural areas among landless *dalits* and *adivasis* (Sundaram and Tendulkar 2003).

Recognizing that land conflicts could not be adequately resolved solely through conventional political channels and that isolated villagers were more prone to violence and dispossession, Rajagopal P. V., founded Ekta Parishad (Unity Forum) in 1991. Rajagopal P. V. was active in the state of Madhya Pradesh since the 1970s working with S. N. Subba Rao and other Gandhians on the problem of armed banditry in the Chambal region. Their efforts contributed to the mass surrender and rehabilitation of *dacoits* (bandits). Rajagopal P. V. subsequently turned his attention to the displacement of *adivasis* from forestland and broader issues of land dispossession.

Ekta Parishad is a network of rural based development and social service organizations that draws on Gandhi’s ideology and strategy for social change. Rather than operating as a centralized organization, Ekta Parishad operates more like an umbrella organization that unites various villages and NGOs engaged in land and resource struggles.

Between 1994 and 1998 Ekta Parishad mobilized pressure against the state government in Madhya Pradesh through marches, political rallies, *chakkajams* (road blockages), *gheraos* (surrounding a building) and *dharnas* (sit-ins). However by 1999 the defining method of Ekta Parishad became the extended foot march, or *padayatra*, and the *yatra*, which may involve other forms of transportation as well. Although Indian politicians frequently undertake short *padayatras* as a means to generate media coverage, Ekta Parishad uses the method in a manner consistent with the Gandhian tradition of *satyagraha* (truth force), the term Gandhi applied to his philosophy and principled practice of nonviolent resistance.

*Padayatra* campaigns require substantial planning and preparation and are carried out in a highly organized and disciplined manner. Activists based in the countryside arrange the logistics concerning the route of the *padayatra* and accommodations for marchers. Since 1999 Ekta Parishad has organized scores of *padayatra* campaigns. Statewide *padayatras* last in duration from weeks to many months (see table 1). Each statewide *padayatra* begins with a political rally in a major city that mobilizes thousands of people. At the rally activists and movement sympathizers give speeches and afterwards the journey commences with a core of activists traveling through the countryside. In villages where they stop, public hearings are held; villagers are encouraged to organize their communities and network with Ekta Parishad; and case studies are prepared to document problems concerning land, corruption, and violence. During the campaign press releases are written and the media is encouraged to cover the events. Sometimes *padayatras* involve acts of civil disobedience such as *dharnas* and on
Table 1. Major Padayatra/Yatra Campaigns Organized by Ekta Parishad, 1999-2012

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>State Level Campaigns</th>
<th>National Campaigns</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Madhya Pradesh 10 December 1999 to 18 June 2000</td>
<td><em>Janadesh Satyagraha</em>, Gwalior to New Delhi 2 October to 28 October 2007</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Bihar 11 September to 11 October 2001</td>
<td><em>Jan Samwaad Yatra</em>, 24 states 2 October 2011 to 1 October 2012</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Madhya Pradesh 14 April to 2 May 2002 30 January to 25 February 2003</td>
<td><em>Jan Satyagraha</em>, Gwalior to Agra 2 October to 11 October 2012</td>
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<tr>
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<td>Chhattisgarh 30 January to 24 February 2004 Odisha 30 January to 24 February 2004</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Chhattisgarh 16 May to 5 June 2005 30 January to 25 February 2003</td>
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occasion Rajagopal P. V. has undertaken fasts to pressure officials to take action. Depending on the length of the campaign, a *padayatra* may pass through hundreds of villages. Campaigns typically end as they begin with a political rally in a city.

The first and longest statewide *padayatra* occurred in Madhya Pradesh from 10 December 1999 to 18 June 2000. The campaign was the first mass-based effort to promote the land rights of marginalized populations in Madhya Pradesh. Over 190 days the campaign covered 3,800 kilometers and passed through approximately 1,500 villages. The campaign generated press coverage and educated the public about land conflicts. During the course of the campaign over 19,000 landless and near landless submitted land related grievances to *jan adalats* (public courts) in the villages (Pai 2007: 11; Ramagundam 2001).

As a result of the campaign, the state government agreed to form a task force to examine the problem of landlessness and to specify mechanisms to redress the issue. The task force formulated a program to ensure possession of land to *dalits* and *adivasis* who have *pattas* (land titles) but no land, regularization of land to *dalits* and *adivasis* cultivating government land, regularization of land to *adivasis* who possessed forestland prior to 1980, and the redistribution of land from illegal encroachers to the landless. The implementation of the program, however, was highly uneven with land distribution to the landless occurring in some districts, but not in others. Moreover, when the Congress Party was defeated and the Bharatiya Janata Party took control of the state assembly in 2003 the program ended. Thus, Ekta Parishad realized that pressure on the central government was necessary to implement land reform policies (Pai 2007: 11-12).

Since 2007 Ekta Parishad, in coalition with a number of NGOs and SMOs, has organized three national *padayatra* or *yatra* campaigns (see table 1). The *Janadesh* (Peoples’ Verdict) *Satyagraha* in 2007 was Ekta Parishad’s first national campaign and one of the largest Gandhian mass mobilizations in recent years. From 2 to 28 October 2007, approximately 25,000 landless people along with their supporters, including activists from over 15 states and 19 countries, marched nearly 350 kilometers along the national highway from Gwalior, Madhya Pradesh to New Delhi (Pai 2007). They held political rallies and press conferences along the way to publicize the issues, resulting in national and international media attention.

Upon reaching New Delhi the landless set up an encampment at a fairground and threatened to march to the parliament building and engage in a *dharna* until the government met their demands for a new land reform policy. As a result of the pressure, the government accepted the demands of the *Janadesh* campaign and agreed to organize a National Land Reform...
Committee headed by the Minister of Rural Development with 50 percent of its members selected by grassroots organizations. The committee was charged with drawing up a National Land Policy and empowered to direct state governments to enact appropriate land reform legislation.

The Janadesh campaign was followed up in 2011-2012 with a yearlong Jan Samwaad Yatra campaign in which a group of activists traveled through twenty four states to mobilize people and generate public support. It culminated in October 2012 with the Jan Satyagraha; a second planned 350-kilometer march this time with 60,000 landless people and their supporters, from Gwalior to New Delhi. Nine days into the march, in the town of Agra, the Minister for Rural Development, Jairam Ramesh, met with the marchers, agreed to the demands of the satyagrahis and signed a ten-point agreement with Rajagopal P. V. that specified a roadmap for land reform. The crux of the agreement involved effective implementation of existing laws at the local level. Ekta Parishad agreed to call off the remainder of the march, but threatened to reorganize the march and continue from Agra to New Delhi at some time in the future if concrete progress concerning the implementation of the rule of law did not occur.

Through padayatra campaigns Ekta Parishad has forced the government to publicly acknowledge the legitimacy of the issues and concerns of the landless and near landless, placed land reform on the national agenda, and produced tangible results in some places in the form of land redistribution, the validation of ownership by conferring official land titles, and the prevention of evictions of adivasis from forest land.

**BRAZIL: THE MST**

Land inequality in Brazil traces back to Portuguese conquest beginning in the sixteenth century whereby the Portuguese monarchy gave sesmarias (concessions granting the right to use land) to a handful of individuals. The settlement process displaced indigenous peoples and led to the concentration of land into large landholdings (latifúndios) often used as sugar or coffee plantations or cattle ranches. In 1850 the Lei de Terras (Land Statute) created private property and converted sesmaria rights holders into private landowners of large estates (latifundiários). The law legalized posses (informal squatter claims) up to that date, but forbade further land acquisition through squatting. The statute perpetuated the concentration of rural property in the hands of a few and effectively blocked the distribution of land to immigrant workers and, after slavery was abolished in 1888, to former slaves (Alston, Libecap, and Mueller 1999: 34-35; dos Santos Cunha 2011: 1172-1174). To this day a relatively small class of large landowners owns much of the agricultural land in Brazil, wields inordinate influence in Brazilian politics, and opposes serious land reform.

An exception to the pattern of large landholdings was in the southern-most states of Rio Grande do Sul, Santa Catarina, and Paraná where a family farm tradition resulted from government policies in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries that encouraged European immigrants to settle on the land. Nevertheless by the 1970s land inequality and conflict in the south intensified as well. One factor was population pressure, as over a few generations family farms became too small to subdivide further. Other factors included the expulsion of people from land to build giant hydroelectric dams and large industrial farms as part of the Green Revolution. The government’s policy of agricultural modernization favored large landowners, industrial agriculture, and export crops resulting in land alienation, concentration of land ownership, and environmental degradation (Graziano da Silva 1982; Hall 1990). As a result of these factors and more Brazil has one of the most unequal distributions of land in the world.9

By the late 1970s increasing levels of land inequality and the failure of the government to adequately address land reform led to a large and growing population of aggrieved landless people. In an effort to attain their own land to cultivate, people began taking over unproductively used rural land through unarmed land occupations. Progressive Catholic and Lutheran clergy affiliated with the Pastoral Commission on Land (Comissão Pastoral da Terra;
Rightful Radical Resistance

or CPT) and Marxist activists concerned with rural violence and inequality subsequently began organizing land occupations. Activists realized that they could not depend solely on conventional politics to promote change and recognized the potential power of land occupations for forcing the government to redistribute land if they were implemented in an organized, disciplined, and strategic manner. They also realized that sustained mass mobilization was necessary to generate pressure from outside the system and that a national movement would be in a stronger position to resist repression and confront landowners and the state. Their efforts led to the founding of the Movimento dos Trabalhadores Rurais sem Terra (MST) in 1984 (Branford and Rocha 2002; Carter 2011; Hammond 1999, 2009; Stédile and Fernandes 1999; Wolford 2010; Wright and Wolford 2003).

The MST is not a Gandhian organization nor is it widely recognized as a “nonviolent” social movement organization due in part to its Marxist ideology and militant direct actions and in part to opponents’ attempts to frame it as a violent movement. Moreover, the MST implements actions that involve the destruction of property—a fuzzy area between nonviolent and violent resistance—in their opposition to industrial agriculture. MST activists, for example, targeted Monsanto and Syngenta research sites and destroyed greenhouses and fields where GMO crops were grown. Nevertheless most of their methods fall within the realm of nonviolent action including long marches to the national capital (similar to padayatras undertaken by Ekta Parishad), protest demonstrations, public vigils, road blockades, sit-ins at government buildings, encampments, and the defining method of the MST, the highly organized and disciplined land occupation.10 Although land occupations are not legal (neither are many forms of nonviolent action), they are undertaken in order to pressure the government to implement existing laws concerning land reform.11 While landowners often characterize land occupations as violent, unarmed land occupations are a form of nonviolent resistance with the vast preponderance of the violence carried out by landowners and the state.12

Before a land occupation is organized the MST identifies land that fulfills two characteristics. First, the land must be expropriable, i.e., considered not in productive use and/or not serving its social function and thus eligible for redistribution under Brazilian law; and second, the land must be cultivable; i.e., suitable for supporting an agricultural settlement. The MST also targets land in which there is doubt over the rightful ownership, as it is not uncommon for fraud or violence to be used in the rough and often lawless Brazilian countryside to attain or increase landholdings (Holston 1991).

After suitable land is identified and a sufficient number of landless people has been mobilized, an occupation is carried out. Occasionally armed agents of landowners or the state meet the occupiers to prevent the occupation or evict them from the land. Although defensive violence by the MST has sometimes occurred, especially in earlier years of the movement, the policy of the MST is to retreat and organize a new occupation rather than to challenge land-owners and the state with violence—a strategy with which it would be at a decided disadvantage.13 Once land has been occupied, the MST initiates legal proceedings to challenge eviction notices and to have the land officially expropriated and redistributed by the government (a process that may take years). If the legal battle is won, then activists attempt to build a permanent agricultural settlement. If not, then an encampment is set up on the side of a road or on other public land and preparation for a new land occupation begins. Although the MST mobilizes pressure against the state, it also relies on the state’s agrarian reform agencies to implement the rule of law, legitimize its possession of occupied land, and provide agricultural credit and technical assistance once land is attained.

Land occupations have occurred on a continuous basis in Brazil since the 1980s, with 8,789 reported for the twenty-five years between 1988 and 2012, involving 1,221,658 families, with peaks in 1999 (856 occupations) and 2004 (662 occupations) (DATALUTA: Banco de Dados da Luta Pela Terra, 2013; Gráfico 1, Tabela 1) (see figure 1). The MST has not organized all of the land occupations in Brazil, as other groups have emulated land occupations, but the MST was instrumental in demonstrating the viability of land occupations and it has implemented a majority of occupations. Through the strategic use of land occupations the MST succeeded in
putting land reform on the political agenda, which resulted in a substantial redistribution of land to the landless. From the mid-1980s to the early 2000s the MST forced the government to redistribute over 20 million acres of land to over 350,000 formerly landless families (Wright and Wolford 2003: xiii).

**ANALYTICAL COMPARISON: SIMILARITIES**

The political contexts in India and Brazil are broadly similar as both are semiperipheral, (representative) democracies, with relatively high-capacity states and constitutional principles and laws that support land reform and social justice despite inequitable distributions of land, and have sizable populations that depend on access to land for a dignified livelihood. The broad similarity in context is causally related to the broadly similar strategy to promote land reform developed by Ekta Parishad and the MST and their interactions with authorities and third parties are characterized by roughly similar dynamics of contention (see table 2).

**Table 2. Similar Dynamics of Contention: Ekta Parishad and the MST**

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strategy</th>
<th>Mobilizing campaigns of civil resistance to promote change through institutional channels.</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Fulcrum for Change</td>
<td>Leveraging constitutional principles and laws supporting land reform.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bases of Power</td>
<td>Sustaining mass mobilization, territorializing, and upward scale shift.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Rather than focusing on electoral politics or taking up arms against the state, Ekta Parishad and the MST mobilize grassroots campaigns of civil resistance outside of conventional political channels to promote change through legal channels. They incorporate aspects of *rightful resistance* by highlighting gaps between constitutional principles, laws, and national policy directives and their nonimplementation or violation on the ground, and engaging in collective action to gain the attention of authorities. However, they go beyond
rightful resistance to *rightful radical resistance* by wielding power through sustained campaigns of nonviolent direct action, territorialization and upward scale shift. Moreover, they are openly critical of the state and its class-biased implementation of the rule of law and pursue the radical goal—in the context of rural India and Brazil—of extending democratic citizenship rights to marginalized people.¹⁵

**Fulcrum for Change**

In both countries there are constitutional principles and laws that support more equitable distributions of land. However, due to the inordinate influence of landowner (*latifundîários* in Brazil, and rich and—to a lesser extent—middle peasants in India) and corporate interests in politics, there is an acute disjuncture between the theory of the rule of law and its actual practice (Meszaros 2000; Saxena 2011). The gap between legal principles and actual land distributions generates mobilizing grievances, and is the basis for framing issues (e.g., Snow, Rochford, Worden, and Benford 1986), but it also provides a fulcrum for change that can be leveraged through strategic collective action that compels authorities to act.

The federalist system in India places land reform under the domain of each state, with the central government occasionally specifying policy directives through various agencies and commissions. Some states, most notably Kerala in the late 1960s and 1970s and West Bengal in the 1970s and 1980s, implemented significant land reform when coalitions of left-wing parties took office, but most states have not. State-level laws were passed that impose land-ceilings, reform tenancy relations, and prohibit the transfer of *adivasi* land to non-*adivasis*; however these have not been adequately enforced. In Madhya Pradesh, for example, *adivasis* are forced off their land despite the Madhya Pradesh Land Revenue Code of 1959 that banned the transfer of land from *adivasis* to non-*adivasis* without the permission of the government and the more stringent 1976 code that banned all such transfers. Similarly, the 1960 Madhya Pradesh Land Ceiling Act, which limits the amount of land a family can hold, has not been adequately enforced (Ramagundam 2001).

Moreover, India’s constitution proclaims commitment to an egalitarian social order and the central government has in principle shown concern for social justice and land reform. After independence in 1947 the central government, through the J. C. Kumarappa Committee of the Congress Party, outlined broad principles of land reform which it expected states to adopt in crafting their laws, including abolishment of the *zamindari* system and intermediaries, limitations on individual landholdings with compensation to the landowner and redistribution of the surplus to the landless, and security of land tenure for small farmers. These principles were subsequently incorporated into the Indian Constitution of 1950 (Gae 1973; Merillat 1970; Saxena 2011). Drawing on these precedents Ekta Parishad pressured the government to set up a National Land Reform Commission with responsibilities for directing states to implement land reform. The commission was established after the national *padayatra* campaign in 2007 and the Minister of Rural Development agreed to a ten-point roadmap for land reform following the national *padayatra* campaign in 2012.

Similarly, in Brazil there is a strong legal presumption in favor of the “social function of property” dating back to its establishment as a principle in the Brazilian Constitution of 1934, which states “the right of property is protected, provided it is not exerted against any social or collective interests, in the forms determined by law.” “Any social or collective interest” encompasses the concept of the social function of property (dos Santos Cunha 2011: 1175). All subsequent constitutions (1937, 1946, 1967 and 1988) have included a “social function of property” clause (dos Santos Cunha 2011: 1175 fn 21). Even the Land Statute of 1964, passed at the beginning of the military dictatorship, authorized the government to expropriate large landholdings if the land was unproductive and the expropriation served the public interest (Dalton 2012: 178-179). Furthermore, Article 184 of the 1988 Brazilian constitution, adopted in the aftermath of the twenty-one year military dictatorship, states “It is within the power of the Union to expropriate on account of social interest . . . rural property which is not performing
its social function” (Dalton 2012: 179). Subsequently social function was defined by statute as at least 80% of the land in productive use, respect of labor and environmental standards, and the use of land benefits landowners and workers (Ankersen and Ruppert 2006: 102).

**Bases of Power**

The disjuncture between authoritative legal documents, entrenched rights, and the reality of land inequality and dispossession provides a fulcrum for change; but in order to generate leverage within institutional political and legal spheres sustained mass mobilization, territorialization, and scale shift are necessary. Mobilizing relatively large numbers of committed people is probably necessary for winning new collective benefits for those underrepresented in politics (Amenta, Caren and Olasky 2005) and higher levels of participation in campaigns of civil resistance increases their likelihood of success (Chenoweth and Stephan 2011). As noted above, Ekta Parishad has undertaken scores of *padayatra* campaigns since the 1990s with national campaigns mobilizing between 25,000 and 60,000 people. Similarly, the MST has carried out thousands of land occupations since the early 1980s involving millions of people. These actions provide the means for large numbers of people to participate while simultaneously promoting their solidarity, empowerment, and commitment to the struggle; raising the public’s awareness about conflict in the countryside; and forcing the government to acknowledge and address land inequality through implementing the rule of law.

An advantage of large landowners is that rural populations tend to be geographically dispersed. In order to overcome the disadvantage of geographic isolation, rural movements must territorialize; i.e., organize actions beyond their original territorial base. According to Mançano Fernandes (2005: 326), “Territorialized movements are those that are organized and act in different places at the same time, made possible by their form of organization, which permits spatialization of the struggle for land. The MST is an example of this.” From its emergence in the far south of Brazil in the early 1980s the MST gradually diffused north through relational mechanisms becoming a national movement. Territorialization provides challengers with the ability to more effectively confront landowners, security forces, and the state.

Similarly the impetus driving the formation of Ekta Parishad was the realization that isolated rural struggles were more prone to repression, whereas territorialization would empower and protect marginalized rural people. In the 1990s Ekta Parishad initiated a process of brokered diffusion among previously unconnected Gandhian organizations dealing with rural development issues, as well with NGOs concerned with sustainable development, indigenous peoples, and human rights. Beginning in the state of Madhya Pradesh it territorialized eastward to Chhattisgarh, Bihar, Jharkhand and Odisha on its way towards developing a national presence.

Whereas territorialization refers to the horizontal spread of a movement’s coordinated contentious actions across geographic space through relational diffusion or brokerage, upward scale shift refers to the “change in the number and level of coordinated contentious actions to a different focal point, involving a new range of actors, different objects, and broadened claims” (McAdam et al. 2001: 331). Both Ekta Parishad and the MST have targeted political actions at progressively higher levels from the local to the transnational and they have broadened their claims from attaining land and preventing dispossession to transforming state development policies and extending democratic citizen rights.

With Ekta Parishad, local campaigns were followed by statewide and national campaigns, each of which targeted different levels of government. Although having some success at the state level, Ekta Parishad realized that it had to pressure the central government to implement more lasting change. Similarly, the MST has brought the struggle for land in the countryside into the corridors of state and national governments as well. Sit-ins in the offices of state and national level government officials and agencies and pressure on INCRA has enabled the MST to influence government officials that historically were relatively immune from taking the side of the landless in their conflicts with large landowners.

Furthermore, both social movement organizations have been involved in transnational networks that target the global food regime, global land grabbing, and international institutions
of neoliberalism such as the World Bank, International Monetary Fund, and the World Trade Organization. The MST has been active in the global justice movement as an important member of *La Vía Campesina* and as an original member of the organizing committee of the World Social Forum. Similarly, Ekta Parishad had a presence at the 2004 World Social Forum outside of Mumbai, sent activists to World Social Forums in Brazil, is affiliated with *La Vía Campesina*, and has sent representatives to its various international meetings. Finally, both movements have cultivated support from citizens and NGOs in other countries. Ekta Parishad, for example, has partnered with ActionAid International, and Ekta Europe is a network of NGOs and individuals in Europe who support the work of Ekta Parishad. The MST, for example, has partnered with Global Exchange and the Institute for International Cooperation and Development, and Friends of the MST is a network of NGOs and individuals in the US who support the MST with chapters in Boston, Chicago, New York, San Francisco, and Washington DC.

*Causal Factors Contributing to Similar Strategies*

What factors contribute to the implementation of *rightful radical resistance* in both cases? In both countries land alienation and dispossession have occurred despite the existence of laws and constitutional principles that support equitable land distributions. The disjuncture generates mobilizing grievances and provides a fulcrum that can potentially be leveraged through collective action. But why engage in high-risk nonviolent actions instead of conventional politics? In Brazil the inordinate influence of large landholders in the electoral and legal spheres has inhibited serious land reform from occurring through conventional politics. In the more heterogeneous political landscape of India there have been instances of serious land reform occurring through conventional politics, most notably in the states of Kerala and West Bengal where the Communist Party of India (Marxist) forged ruling coalitions. However in states where left-wing parties are weaker, reliance on conventional political channels has been ineffective and extra-institutional actions are necessary to generate pressure on the government and catalyze the support of allies within officialdom.

Why engage in civil resistance rather than violent resistance? In high-capacity states, violence is likely to be highly episodic and suppressed by state forces (Tilly 2006). As states have become stronger over time, the likelihood of violent peasant and indigenous resistance to succeed—unless it occurs in the context of state breakdown—has decreased. In Brazil armed resistance is not a feasible option given the capacity of the Brazilian state and the coherence of the military. The last violent peasant rebellion of note, in northern Paraná by peasants affiliated with the *Partido Comumista Brasileiro* (Brazilian Communist Party) was suppressed by the military in 1951. In India violent resistance by Maoist Naxalites occurs due to the fragmented and heterogeneous demography, pockets of jungle and mountain terrain outside of effective state control, and permeable border with Nepal. However, it is highly unlikely that the Naxalite challenge in India will gain widespread support, especially given its extensive killing of innocent civilians. Thus, states such as India and Brazil have a strategic advantage with regard to the means of violence, whereas the citizens’ advantage lies with civil resistance (Sharp 1973).

Moreover, in democratic contexts armed resistance is less justifiable than is unarmed resistance and more likely to alienate potential supporters. Compared with violent movements, nonviolent resistance movements are more likely to attain broad-based support, gain influential allies and limit social polarization (Martin 2009); and they are more likely to mobilize greater numbers of people than are violent campaigns due to lower physical, moral, and informational barriers to participation (Chenoweth and Stephan 2011: 32-39). Through civil resistance Ekta Parishad and the MST have mobilized relatively large numbers of people and cultivated the support of segments of the public and allies within officialdom that they otherwise would have not been able to do if their challenges were violent.

Why have the challenges remained prosecuted primarily through civil resistance and have not (up to this point) been transformed by the twin processes of institutionalization and radicalization? Institutionalization and radicalization are processes that have characterized a number of
nonviolent struggles such as new social movements in Western Europe (Koopmans 1993), the civil rights struggle in Northern Ireland (Maney 2012), and the U.S. civil rights movement (Santoro and Fitzgerald 2015), whereby a nonviolent movement demobilizes and divides into factions with some withdrawing entirely into the sphere of conventional politics and others pressing for violent change and more extreme goals. In the civil rights movements in the U.S. in the 1960s and in Northern Ireland in the 1970s for example, government reform convinced some groups to pursue their goals through conventional politics. Others, however, dissatisfied with the extent of progress through nonviolent protest pressed for more extreme goals and violent strategies (see, respectively, Santoro and Fitzgerald 2015; Maney 2012).20

Both Ekta Parishad and the MST have sustained mobilization of nonviolent resistance and averted the twin processes of institutionalization and radicalization for a variety of reasons. First, they were both explicitly founded as social movement organizations with the intent to remain autonomous from political parties and to generate political pressure through extrastitutional channels, thus the pull to conventional politics has been weak. Second, segments of the civil rights challenge in the U.S. that were dissatisfied with progress adopted black power ideology, sought the goal of black nationalism, and supported violence as a strategy (Santoro and Fitzgerald 2015). Segments of the civil rights struggle in Northern Ireland that were dissatisfied with reform adopted nationalist and secessionist demands and violence as well (Maney 2012). Nationalist and separatist goals, however, are less relevant to the land rights challenges in India and Brazil where identity is based on socioeconomic status rather than race or religion. Third, organizational structure affects the form that collective action is likely to take. Fragmented movements more likely to use violence, while organizational cohesion is a necessary, but not sufficient, condition for effective nonviolent resistance (Pearlman 2011). Ekta Parishad and the MST have up to this point remained coherent and not experienced fragmentation. Fourth, at least with regard to the MST, the success of the struggle in attaining land has diminished the threat of dissatisfaction and bifurcation into conventional and violent spheres. Finally, the likelihood that Ekta Parishad will fragment into violent factions is remote given its adherence to Gandhian theory and praxis. Thus, the twin processes of institutionalization and radicalization seem more relevant for explaining strategy shifts in social movements rather than social movement organizations; in movements where race, religion or nationality are primary identities; and in movements where there is substantial dissatisfaction with the progress towards attaining goals despite some reform.

ANALYTICAL COMPARISON: DIFFERENCES

Although there are underlying commonalities concerning the logic of struggle and dynamics of contention, there are also some fundamental differences across the two movements as specified in table 3. Below I analyze variations in ideology, defining method of nonviolent action, and mechanisms of change, which I maintain are a function of differences in history, culture, geography and demography.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 3. Differences Between Ekta Parishad and the MST</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Ideology</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Revolutionary Gandhism; swadeshi; sarvodaya</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Defining Method of Nonviolent Action</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>Padayatra</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Mechanisms of Change</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Accommodation; conversion and nonviolent coercion to a lesser extent</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Ideology

Three types of Gandhism emerged in India after Gandhi’s assassination in 1948: political, institutional and revolutionary (Ostergaard 1985: 4-5). Congress Party politicians, who sought to realize Gandhian objectives through conventional politics, have expressed political Gandhism. A criticism of political Gandhism is that Congress politicians, while claiming to be the successor of the freedom struggle and holding up Gandhi as the Father of the Nation, merely appropriate the symbolism associated with Gandhi while watering down his revolutionary message. Institutional Gandhism has been expressed by social workers concerned with promoting social reform. Revolutionary Gandhism has been manifested through the Sarvodaya movement and activists such as Vinoba Bhave and Jayaprakash Narayan. The founding convener of Ekta Parishad, Rajagopal P. V., falls into the latter category as Ekta Parishad attempts to revitalize the spirit of the revolutionary Gandhi to address land inequality and transform exploitative economic relations (Ramagundam 2001).

Gandhi rejected both capitalism and state socialism, instead favoring a decentralized network of self-reliant and self-governing villages with property held in trust. Central to the work of Ekta Parishad are the Gandhian concepts of swadeshi (self-sufficiency and self-rule) and sarvodaya (welfare for all). Gandhian development rejects competition, promotes cooperation, critiques inequitable distributions of land, and embraces production for local markets instead of monoculture production for export.

The division of Gandhism into separate strands in the decades after the death of Gandhi paralleled divisions that occurred in Christianity in the centuries after the death of Jesus. Similarly, a political Christianity developed as represented by the church hierarchy and its close relations with and ideological support for the state, an institutional Christianity developed as represented by activities of church groups that provide charity or support social reform, and revolutionary strands of Christianity reemerged at various times and places throughout history drawing on the revolutionary ideas of Jesus to challenge the ideological hegemony of the church and state and justify noncooperation with violent institutions and collective action against oppressive social structures. Liberation theology that emerged in the 1960s in Latin America in response to social inequalities and the perception that the Catholic Church was not addressing social problems is a recent manifestation of revolutionary Christianity. Rather than focusing on the afterlife, liberation theology emphasizes the struggle for social justice in the here and now (Boff and Boff 1987; Câmara 1971).

The emergence of the MST in the early 1980s was directly tied to the organizing work of clerics of the CPT informed by liberation theology, and liberation theology remains central to the MST and is reflected in its mistica. In addition the MST draws on Marxist political thought to explain extreme inequalities in the distribution of land and the state’s support for large landowners, multinational corporations, and export agriculture. Their struggle against latifundiários and the capitalist state is informed by the Marxist concept of class struggle (Marx and Engels 2012 [1848]).

In sum, the ideological bases of the movements shape their approach to struggle with the MST taking a more pragmatic approach to nonviolent struggle and Ekta Parishad taking a more principled approach. The different approaches are reflected in methods of action and mechanisms of change.

Defining Method of Nonviolent Action

Both challenges have engaged in tactical innovation by adapting culturally resonant techniques to current contexts in a novel manner in order to sustain protest. In India the padayatra is a familiar method rooted in the tradition of Hindu spiritual pilgrimages. Perhaps the most well-known padayatra was the Salt March organized by Gandhi in 1930, a twenty-four day 390 kilometer march from the Sabarmati Ashram in Gujarat to the Arabian Sea by Gandhi and 78 activists that culminated in the open disobedience of the British Salt Laws.
The march was punctuated by stops in villages to give talks, rally support for the national liberation movement, and encourage village officials to resign from their positions in the British administration. Although the padayatra was part of Gandhi’s revolutionary repertoire, in post-colonial India the impact of the method was muted due to its common use by politicians and the violent response by authorities when used by the marginalized for more radical causes. As David Hardiman (2003: 199) states, “In postcolonial India, it was acceptable for leading politicians to invoke Gandhi in symbolic ways, with padayatras and the like, but not for poor people to apply his methods in assertive nonviolent protest. Their rewards were beatings and police atrocities”. The large-scale national padayatras organized by Ekta Parishad with tens of thousands of people is an innovation that decreases the likelihood of violent repression, results in substantial mass media coverage, and compels government officials to respond to land inequality.

The land occupation has cultural resonance in Brazil due to its long history in peasant and indigenous peoples’ struggles in Latin America (Hobsbawm 1974; Huizer 1972; Veltmeyer 2005). E. J. Hobsbawm (1974: 120-122) distinguishes between three types of land occupations: (1) defensive recuperative occupations that occur when peasants reclaim land that they were alienated from, (2) offensive revolutionary occupations that occur when peasants occupy the demesne holdings of large landowners, and (3) legalistic occupations that occur when the occupied land is unused and unclaimed (although in a technical legalistic sense it may be state owned public land) or when the occupied land is subject to a dispute over the legal ownership (see table 4). Historically, defensive recuperative land occupations were the most common in Latin America.

Bernardo Maçano Fernandes (2005) also identifies three types of land occupations: spontaneous and isolated that are implemented by unorganized small groups in a singular action of survival; organized and isolated that are implemented by organizations from one or more communities whose political activities end after the attainment of land; and organized and spatialized that are implemented by an organized and territorialized social movement (see table 4). The first two types, which have been traditionally implemented in Latin America, are nonterritorialized in the sense that the struggle ends once land is attained. By contrast, the MST has forged organized and spatialized land occupations that are part of a broader political project to transform agrarian relations. The land occupation, in other words, is the first step rather than the climax of the struggle.

Finally, differentiations can be made between communal and composite land occupations (see table 4). Communal land occupations, which have a long history in Latin America, are carried out by an entire community of peasants or indigenous peoples that has been dispossessed of land as a collective entity. By contrast the MST organizes composite land occupations carried out by people from various communities and sometimes from different parts of the country. In contrast to communal land occupations where solidarity is preexisting, the MST creates community and solidarity through political education, identity work, and mística incorporated throughout the entire process of land occupations and beyond (Chabot and Vinthagen 2007). In the planning stage, groups of people in different communities meet for a period of months undergoing political education, consciousness raising, and identity formation. As an occupation occurs, participants from different communities converge on the land. Often the occupiers are isolated from outside contact thus creating a situation where community and solidarity are necessary for survival (Hammond 1999).

Through tactical innovation the MST created a type of land occupation that fuses elements of various types of land occupations identified in table 4. The act of carrying out the land occupation is illegal (revolutionary); and carried out on private land that is eligible for redistribution under the law (offensive), or on public land or land in which there is a question over the legal ownership (legalistic); by people not necessarily tied by communal bonds (composite); brought together by a territorialized social movement organization (organized and spatialized). Furthermore, the method is part of a broader political project to promote democratic citizenship and transform Brazilian agricultural. Thus while drawing on a tradi-
Table 4. Types of Land Occupations.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type</th>
<th>Description</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Defensive recuparative</td>
<td>Implemented to attain the land from which a community was dispossessed.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Offensive revolutionary</td>
<td>Implemented to attain the land of large landowners from which individuals or communities were not recently (or ever) dispossessed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Legalistic</td>
<td>Implemented to attain unused public land or land in which there is a question or dispute over legal ownership.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spontaneous and isolated</td>
<td>Implemented by unorganized small groups in a singular action of survival. Nonterritorialized</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Organized and isolated</td>
<td>Implemented by organizations from one or more communities whose political activities end after the attainment of land. Nonterritorialized.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Organized and spatialized</td>
<td>Implemented by an organized and territorialized social movement. Part of a broader political project.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Communal</td>
<td>Implemented by a traditional peasant or indigenous community.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Composite</td>
<td>Implemented by people from different communities brought together by a social movement organization.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Scholars of civil resistance have identified various mechanisms through which nonviolent resistance may promote change (Lakey 1968; Sharp 1973). Conversion occurs when the persuasion or suffering of nonviolent challengers influences the emotions or beliefs of the opponent, who then concedes to their demands. Conversion is more likely in conflicts between individuals or small-groups where there is direct face-to-face interaction. By contrast, in conflicts between larger collectivities where there is an inherent clash of interests, a power struggle between the protest and noncooperation of the challengers and the responses of opponents is likely to determine the outcome. If change occurs in larger scale struggles, it is likely due to accommodation or nonviolent coercion. Accommodation occurs when the opponent grants concessions to the challenger even though the opponent is not necessarily converted to the challenger’s point of view, is not forced to concede by the challenger’s actions, and has the capacity to continue the struggle without making concessions. Authorities may accommodate a challenge when they calculate that the costs of ignoring or repressing it are greater than the costs of giving in to some or all of its demands, or when giving in to some or all of the challenger’s demands may preempt the development of a larger movement. Although the term coercion is typically associated with violence or the threat of violence, coercion may result from nonviolent actions in which violence is not used or threatened. Through nonviolent coercion change is achieved when the nonviolent actions of challengers, or their threatened nonviolent actions, limit the opponent’s options and compel or force the opponent to alter their behavior, policies, or structure.

Ekta Parishad attempts to convert the views of authorities through persuasion or suffering of satyagrahis, but it does not rely on conversion. The mechanism of change often involves accommodation as mass mobilizations make it impossible for their demands to be ignored and pressure the government to take action on land issues by enforcing the law. When civil dis-
obedience is threatened or implemented such as through dharnas, then nonviolent coercion may be invoked. By contrast, the MST does not attempt to convert large landowners or officials through persuasion or suffering. Instead it relies on direct action to force officials to act. Land occupations expose the existence of idle land, set in motion the legal process that may result in the expropriation and redistribution by INCRA, and ultimately nonviolently coerce the government to implement the law (Dalton 2012: 177, 196).

Causal Factors Contributing to Differences in Strategy

What factors contribute to different tactical choices? Although both Ekta Parishad and the MST engage in rightful radical resistance, the specific form that it assumes varies due to differences in historical, cultural, demographic and geographic factors across the two contexts. Differences in ideology are a function of history and culture, with Gandhism indigenous to India and prevalent among Indian social change organizations, and liberation theology indigenous to Latin America and Marxism prevalent among progressive organizations in the region. Specifically, in Brazil the CPT, which facilitated the formation of the MST and serves as an influential ally, is motivated by liberation theology; and Marxism continues to be a potent ideology among activists and intellectuals involved in rural struggles even after the demise of state socialism (Welch 2006).

Although each movement incorporates numerous methods of nonviolent action, in each case the defining method has given the movement traction due to the appropriate match to the context. Ekta Parishad encourages land occupations, especially recuperative defensive occupations by adivasis dispossessed of forestland and legalistic occupations of idle and cultivable public land where available, but the land occupation is not central to its strategy of resistance. Nor should it be, as large swathes of idle agricultural land do not exist in India as in Brazil and the ratio of landless people to idle land is relatively high in India. The defining method of Ekta Parishad, the padayatra, resonates with Hindu and Gandhian traditions, and is geographically appropriate as it provides a means for communicating among people and brokering connections between villages in rural areas where the network of roads and electricity is sparse.

Although the MST has organized long marches (padayatras) to promote land reform, such as the National March for Agrarian Reform in May 2005 by 12,000 people over 230 kilometers from Goiânia to Brasília, they are secondary to land occupations. The land occupation works in Brazil as it is part of the historically embedded repertoire of contention and there are favorable geographic and demographic conditions in which the ratio of landless to idle land is relatively low; there are over 4 million landless rural families and over 90 million hectares of unproductive land (Mattei 2005: 347).

Differences in the mechanisms of change through which campaigns promote land rights are a function of variations in ideology, defining method of nonviolent action, and goals of the movements. Ekta Parishad is committed to Gandhian social change; therefore it is principled in its use of nonviolent action and always open to communication and negotiation with landowners and the government. Its campaigns are based on the principles of “Samvad, Sangharsh and Rachna” (Dialogue, Struggle and Construction) (Ekta Parishad 2002: 70). That is, campaigns always begin with dialogue with government officials in order to persuade them to implement existing policies and enforce existing laws. If policies and laws are not implemented or enforced after dialogue, then campaigns are organized to promote mass mobilization, generate pressure on government officials, and seek the support of higher-level officials. Before a campaign commences a Declaration of Satyagraha is released that openly declares the intent and purpose of collective action, specifies problems that exist, and proclaims that since repeated appeals to government officials have failed to bring any action there is a need for large-scale mobilization that the government cannot ignore. Construction refers to the consolidation of gains won through struggle to promote self-sufficiency and democratic decentralization (swadeshi).
By contrast the MST is pragmatic in its use of nonviolent resistance and not committed to nonviolence in principle. The MST is informed by Marxist concepts such as class struggle and has adopted the slogan “Ocupar, Resistir, Produzir!” (Occupy, Resist, Produce!). In discussing the logic behind land occupations, one of the MST leaders, João Pedro Stédile, referring to idle agricultural land, states,

There are unused properties in the region. There is only one way to force the government to expropriate them. You think they’ll do it if we write them a letter? Asking the mayor is a waste of time, especially if he’s a landowner. You could talk to the priest, but if he’s not interested, what’s the point? We have to organize and take over the land ourselves. (quoted in Stédile 2002: 82)

The MST, in other words, dives into the struggle phase through direct actions without first trying to persuade landowners or government officials to redistribute land, and given the necessity for secrecy in planning land occupations, there is no open declaration of the actions to be implemented.

Finally, the specific reforms sought influence the actions adopted and mechanisms of change. For the MST, the main goal concerning landlessness is the redistribution of land owned by latifundiários, whereas for Ekta Parishad, providing security of tenure to small-farmers and tenant cultivators is equally important as redistributing land to the landless. In the Brazilian context, land occupations are direct actions that set in motion legal mechanisms that may ultimately force latifundiários to cede land and force the government to implement the law through nonviolent coercion. By contrast, in India land titles (pattas) for small farmers and tenants cannot be directly attained—as can land—through direct actions; they must be attained through accommodations with government officials.

Thus variations in the form that rightful radical resistance assumes in India and Brazil are related to the appropriate matching of methods to the differential cultural, demographic and geographic contexts. For challenges in the US, Amenta et al. (2005) suggest a political mediation model in which challenger strategies must be matched to the political context to produce favorable results. From a broader comparative perspective, this study suggests that in addition to the political context, the appropriate matching of methods to the cultural, demographic and geographic context—at least with regard to land rights movements—is as important as the political context.

**CONCLUSIONS**

In the final section I discuss the relevance of civil resistance for landless struggles against direct and structural violence, the relevance of insights from the civil resistance literature for explaining rural land rights movements, and situate the challenges in India and Brazil in broader comparative perspective.

*Civil Resistance to Structural Violence*

Civil resistance has proven to be an effective method in challenging authoritarian regimes and contributing to regime change (e.g., Chenoweth and Stephan 2011; Nepstad 2011; Schock 2005). However, a criticism of civil resistance is that while it may work in contexts where there is a clear dichotomy between the ruler and the ruled, the objects and agents of violence are clearly identified, and the opponent alienates large segments of the population and loses (or never had) legitimacy—as in struggles against dictators, one-party regimes, or foreign occupiers—it is a less suitable strategy for challenging structural violence or direct violence legitimated by a hegemonic ideology. Although some scholars of civil resistance have emphasized the potential of nonviolent struggle in combatting structural relations, such as
mobilization, economic inequality, capitalism, and militarism (e.g., Burrowes 1996; de Ligt 1937; Martin 2001), overall it seems that scholars of civil resistance have barely scratched the surface in this regard. In this study I provide some evidence that civil resistance may be relevant for challenging the structural violence of land inequality and dispossession and the direct violence of landowners and the state.

A closely related criticism is that the civil resistance literature is biased towards explaining urban-based prodemocracy movements in authoritarian regimes with much less attention given to rural movements, challenges to structural violence, and challenges to direct violence legitimated by the hegemonic ideology undergirding exploitive capitalist relations (see Chabot and Sharifi 2013; Schock 2015c). The overwhelming focus on prodemocracy struggles by scholars of civil resistance is somewhat paradoxical given Gandhi’s emphasis on rural development, social justice and economic equity. In fact Gandhi was much more concerned with the devolution of power to villages and combatting structural violence than he was with attaining independence. In this study I provide some evidence that civil resistance concepts and assumptions, in combination with social movements concepts and assumptions, are useful for understanding dynamics of rural land rights movements that challenge structural violence.

**Forms of Resistance in Comparative Perspective**

Kevin J. O’Brien (1996, 2013; O’Brien and Li 2006), in his analysis of rural protest in China, situates rightful resistance on a continuum between everyday forms of resistance and violent rebellion. Unlike everyday resistance, rightful resistance is noisy, public, and open and unlike violent rebellion, rightful resistance stops short of violence, does not view the state and its laws as arbitrary and alien, and combines legal tactics with collective action to defend lawful rights. Moreover, whereas everyday forms of resistance and violent rebellion are often characterized by a two party game, with sharp divisions between subordinates and superordinates, rightful resistance is more characteristic of a three party game, where divisions within the state and elite allies matter greatly.

Like rightful resistance, rightful radical resistance is noisy, public, and open; refrains from armed rebellion for principled or pragmatic reasons; does not view the state and its laws as arbitrary and alien, but rather as biased in their implementation of the rule of law; combines legal tactics with collective action to defend lawful rights; and is more characteristic of a three party game, where support from allies within officialdom is necessary to implement the rule of law. Moreover, rightful radical resistance, while incorporating some elements of rightful resistance, goes well beyond the limits of rightful resistance through sustained nonviolent direct actions and counterhegemonic perspectives on development. It also differs from revolutionary resistance, which is typically conceptualized as involving armed resistance against landowners and the state with the objective of taking over the state and implementing new political, economic and legal regimes. Future research might want to address whether rightful radical resistance in democratic contexts is an analog to rightful resistance in authoritarian contexts or whether it is something altogether different, as well as why rightful radical resistance is sustained in some contexts, suppressed in some contexts, and altogether absent in others.

Finally, as rights consciousness becomes more widespread globally and penetrates remote rural areas, as peasants and indigenous peoples become more interconnected through advances in information and communication technologies and denser urban-rural and transnational ties, and as states become stronger in relation to citizens (thus limiting the option of violent rebellion), the likelihood of peasant and indigenous people’s resistance to be manifested through grassroots civil resistance, such as rightful resistance in authoritarian regimes and rightful radical resistance in democracies is likely to increase. The specific form it assumes, however, if not closely matched to the political, cultural, demographic and geographic context, is unlikely to gain traction.
NOTES

1 Civil resistance (also nonviolent resistance or nonviolent struggle) refers to the use of nonviolent actions in campaigns waged by civil society actors engaged in acute and typically asymmetric conflicts with authorities not averse to using violence to defend their interests. Nonviolent actions are overt, nonroutine and extrastitutional acts that may be legal or illegal, but do not involve violence or the threat of violence, such as protest demonstrations, marches, strikes, boycotts, occupations, civil disobedience, etc. (Schock 2013, 2015a, b; Sharp 1973).

2 Other notable exceptions include Wendy Woloford (e.g., 2003a, b, 2010), who combines geographic insights with political content analysis in her analysis of the MST, John L. Hammond (2004) who applies framing theory to his analysis of the MST, and Gabriel Ondetti (2008), who applies political opportunity theory to his analysis of the MST. Works that note the relevance of social movements and civil resistance assumptions for the study of land conflicts include, respectively, Hall (2013: chapter 6) and Corr (1999).

3 See also Alf Gunvald Nilsen (2010: 63-69) who suggests that the Khedut Mazdoor Chetna Sangath (KMCS: Peasants and Workers’ Consciousness Union) mobilizations in anti-dam struggles in the Narmada Valley in India could be considered a form of rightful resistance. Moreover, he suggests that in the context of India, rightful resistance is potentially radical resistance, stating that “the claiming of citizenship is a profoundly radical project in the context of everyday tyranny, and the skills and forms of consciousness engendered through this experience may be vital to the future development of more radical forms of oppositional politics” (69).

4 To a much lesser extent, primary data is also used. I address the disadvantages of relying on secondary sources by examining the (known) population of secondary sources on these movements (in English). Disadvantages are also addressed by my familiarity with each movement as I have engaged in participant observation in campaigns of both social movement organizations, which provide a basis for assessing the validity of secondary sources. Data from participant observation is used in other works.

5 “Radical” and “radicalization” have various meanings. I refer to the two SMOs as “radical” in the sense that they engage in sustained nonviolent direct actions, promote counterhegemonic economic policies and ideologies, and promote the citizenship rights of marginalized peoples thereby threatening the status quo. “Radicalization” refers to the process whereby a struggle fragments into competing groups, with some embracing more exclusive or extremist ideologies and supporting a shift towards violence.

6 Dalits are the stratum at the bottom of the traditional Hindu caste system. The official government title is “Scheduled Castes.” Dalits constitute the largest category of landless in India. The contemporary identity-based Dalit movement in India is shaped by anti-Gandhism sentiment rooted in the rift between Bhimrao Ramji Ambedkar and Mohandas Gandhi concerning the establishment of a separate Dalit electorate during the liberation struggle and Gandhi’s fast that coerced Ambedkar to withdraw his support for a separate electorate. Ekta Parishad is a Gandhian land rights movement rather than a Dalit or Adivasi identity-based movement, with the issue of access to land taking precedent over identities.

7 Adivasis are indigenous traditionally forest-dwelling people, also referred to as “tribal people” or “tribals.” The official government title is “Scheduled Tribes.”

8 The ten points are: (1) the construction of a National Land Reform Policy by the Ministry for Rural Development; (2) the Ministry of Rural Development will work with states to develop programs to distribute agricultural land to the landless in “backward” districts and homestead land to homeless in rural areas; (3) doubling the budget for the “Indira Awas Yojana” program for providing homestead land to the homeless; (4) effective implementation of existing laws that protect land rights and access to land by poor communities; (5) establish fast track land tribunals to deal with pending cases on land conflict; (6) effective implementation of Panchayats Extension to Scheduled Areas Act of 1996; (7) effective implementation of the Forest Rights Act; (8) resolve land disputes between the Forest Department and the Revenue Department; (9) survey and update records of common property resources; and (10) establish a Task Force on Land Reforms by the Ministry of Rural Development to implement the preceding points (Agreement on Land Reforms between the Ministry of Rural Development and Jan Satyagraha; 11 October 2012).

9 Between 1940 and 1980 land inequality in Brazil increased as reflected by an increase in the Gini coefficient from .825 to .853 (Thiesenhusen and Melmed-Sanjak 1990: 396); between 1974 and 1984 the 2% of farms with greater than 1000 hectares increased their control of agricultural land from 48% to 57% (Hall 1990: 206, 210); and approximately 1% of the population owns 46% of the land (Ankersen and Ruppert 2006: 102).

10 See Sean Chabot and Stellan Viinthagen (2007) and Miguel Carter (2011) who argue that the MST is best understood as a nonviolent social movement that promotes democracy, despite its militancy and attempts by opponents and the media to brand it as “violent” and “ antidemocratic.” John L. Hammond (2004) finds that the MST has received some sympathetic coverage, but identifies a negative “ demonization frame” as the most common depiction of the MST in the Brazilian mass media.

11 Significantly, although land occupations are illegal, in 1996 the Superior Tribunal de Justiça ruled that land occupations with the intent to hasten land reform were substantially distinct from criminal acts against property (Carter 2011: 206; Meszaros 2000: 531-532).

12 In Brazil the overwhelming preponderance of violence in rural areas is carried out against the marginalized that struggle for land. According to data collected by the CPT between 1985 and 2014, there were 1,566 killings of landless peasants, small farmers and their sympathizers (Conflitos no Campos Brasil 2014). Land occupations are a form of nonviolent action when they proceed without violence or the threat of violence (Huizer 1972; Sharp 1973: 406-408). Of course, land occupations may also be carried out by armed revolutionary groups that use violence or the threat of violence against landowners, as occurred for example during the Chinese Revolution and in Maoist-inspired struggles elsewhere such as by the Nasalities in India.
Moreover the MST recognizes that support from the public would decline if they were to engage in violent land occupations. According to a public opinion poll by the Brazilian Institute of Public Opinion and Statistics, “85% approved of land occupations as long as they were not violent” (as reported in Hammond 1999: 475; my emphasis).

According to Charles Tilly (2006: 19) a regime refers to “repeated, strong interactions among major political actors including a government.” He makes a useful distinction between four regime types based on two dimensions: government capacity and democracy. Government capacity refers to the “degree to which governmental actions affect distributions of populations, activities, and resources within the government’s jurisdiction, relative to some standard of quality and efficiency” (21). Democracy refers to the “extent to which persons subject to the government’s authority have broad, equal rights to influence governmental affairs and to receive protection from arbitrary governmental action” (21). A cross-classification of the two dimensions provides four crude regime types: high-capacity nondemocratic, low-capacity nondemocratic, high-capacity democratic and low-capacity democratic (2006: 27). Both India and Brazil would be classified as relatively high-capacity democracies, with China a high-capacity nondemocracy.

Ekta Parishad and the MST also engage in building autonomous rural communities. On community building by the MST see, e.g., Wolford (2003b) and Vergara-Camus (2009, 2014).

Key obstacles faced by rural social movements are: (1) mobilizing a constituency that is difficult to organize due to illiteracy and deference to authority, (2) forging networks across geographically dispersed areas, and (3) cultivating support of urban constituencies (Schock 2015c).

For a fascinating account of variations in social mobilization by the MST in the north and south, see Wolford (2010).

The name of the state was officially changed from Orissa to Odisha in 2011.

Maoist Naxalites are active in a number of states along the “Red Corridor” with large adivasi populations, most notably Jharkhand, Chhattisgarh, and Andhra Pradesh. According to data compiled by the Indian Ministry of Home Affairs, Naxal-related violence caused 20,012 deaths between 1980 and 2015, with a majority of them civilian deaths (12,146 civilian deaths, 4,761 Naxalite deaths, and 3,105 state security personnel deaths) (Anand and Singh 2015). Although the killing of civilians is likely to inhibit broad-based support for the Naxalites, some might argue that a positive radical flank effect is occurring as violent acts of Naxalites increases the leverage of nonviolent groups like Ekta Parishad. I doubt this is the case, but this is a topic of another paper.

The processes of institutionalization and radicalization are typically social movement phenomenon. They may also occur within a social movement organization.

Mística is the representation of the struggle through words, art, symbolism, plays, and music. It also refers to a more a more abstract emotional element of empowerment and solidarity. The origins of mística are found in liberation theology (Issa 2007).

Principled and pragmatic nonviolent struggle are terms used by scholars and activists to distinguish between two types of nonviolence. Pragmatic nonviolence emphasizes the use of methods of nonviolent action as a technique for prosecuting a conflict; violence is not used for strategic reasons; and change may necessitate nonviolent coercion of opponents. Principled nonviolence is associated with a way of life in which violence is eliminated as much as possible; violence is rejected on moral grounds; and conflict is perceived as a shared problem among adversaries and the opponent is viewed as a partner in conflict transformation (see Boserup and Mack 1975; Burrowes 1996; Schock 2015a: 24-27).

According Doug McAdam (1983) tactical innovation refers to the use of protest actions in an innovative manner to offset the challengers’ powerlessness and sustain to a campaign.

The names given to the three types of land occupations are not used by Hobsbawm (1974), but rather are my own. See also Bernardo Mançano Fernandes (2005: 325) who classifies Hobsbawm’s types in a slightly different manner.

Although drawing on Marxist concepts such as class struggle and drawing inspiration from Vladimir Lenin, Mao Zedong and Che Guevara, the MST has also deviated from orthodox Marxism thought concerning the extinction of the peasantry through proletarianization (Welch 2006: 45-46) as well as their strategies of political change.

Structural violence refers to diffuse or systemic injustices and inequalities imbedded in institutions or social relations that prevent people from meeting basic human needs such as food, water, shelter, and dignity (Galtung 1969).

REFERENCES


Mobilization


