Dholera
The Emperor's New City

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A growing rentier economy is driving urbanisation infrastructure projects in India without distributive linkages with industrialisation. This rentier economy brings within its purview various combinations of policy such as speculative land markets, real estate and other urban infrastructure investments by global and domestic investors, private consultants and developers, interests within the state at various levels, and landowners willing and able to benefit from rentiering. It hinges crucially on ownership of land, and hence on deeply unequal geographies of rent. There is a need to distinguish rent-driven urbanisation infrastructure projects from industrialisation and concomitant job-creation. The peasantry emerges as absolute surplus population irrelevant to this geography of rent, except as an obstacle to growth.

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In mid-2009, the Gujarat government converted 22 villages along the Gulf of Khambhat into the Dholera Special Investment Region (DSIR). The 920 km² DSIR is constituted under the Gujarat Special Investment Region (SIR) Act 2009, and home to a predominantly agrarian population of 39,300. Dholera will be the first smart city (or *samrat sheher* in local parlance) along the Delhi–Mumbai Industrial Corridor (DMIC).[1] Dholera, however, is not part of the central government's flagship programme of 100 smart cities and the DMIC Development Corporation has created its own criteria for "smartness" in infrastructure and social indicators.[2] As 340 km² of the project area fall under the coastal regulation zone, 580 km² form the "developable land area" of the project. This massive conversion of agrarian land into a greenfield city is an exercise in government planning not unlike the halcyon days of state developmental planning; albeit with newer legal mechanisms and private bodies.

The central contention of this paper is that a growing "rentier economy" is driving urbanisation infrastructure projects over the past decade in India, ostensibly in the name of economic growth. This rentier economy brings within its purview, in varying combinations, policy, speculative land markets, real estate and other urban infrastructure investments by global and domestic investors, private consultants and developers, interests within the state at various levels, and (usually large) landowners willing and able to benefit from rentiering (at least temporarily). The rentier economy hinges crucially on ownership of land, or access to it. There is a need to distinguish rent-driven urbanisation infrastructure projects from industrialisation and concomitant job-creation, despite their conflation in policy rhetoric. The transition to industrialisation and jobs that such projects promise to unleash remains ever elusive—a cover story for rentier-driven dispossession.

As a greenfield city-making project, Dholera offers insights into the scale and implications of this rentier economy in the countryside. Its planning regime grafts existing legal mechanisms like "land-pooling" to new policies for industrial corridors and SIRs, involving private planners and developers. As this study demonstrates, the absence of investor interest, the state's inability to establish consent for the proposed transformation of existing agrarian relations, and elite circuits of rent render the future of Dholera uncertain. Its realisation hinges on anticipated (hence precarious) futures of investment and rent:[3] investment that is expected to arrive once basic infrastructure is in place and rent that is expected to accrue as land

and eventually real estate prices appreciate with the "development" of the area into a "smart city." These precarious futures and circuits of rent are salient features of India's growing rentier economy.[4]

The study was undertaken over a period of four months from March to July 2015 and uses ethnographic and archival material. I interviewed bureaucrats, developers, academics, journalists, lawyers, and activists in Delhi, Ahmedabad, Gandhinagar, Vadodara as well as residents in the villages of the Dholera SIR area. I also participated in six public meetings in and around the Dholera area dealing with the question of dispossession caused by the project. As these villages are sensitive areas of resistance fraught with tensions over "outsider" access,[5] my access to the area was mediated by the non-governmental organisation Khedut Samaj, the statewide land-rights campaign Jameen Adhikar Andolan Gujarat and local Bhal Bachao Samiti activists. My fieldwork in the villages is not comprehensive and was mediated by those opposing the project, but it should be noted that my objective here is not to document the extent of dissent and analyse in detail the social movement organisational dynamics. The material I present should suffice instead to demonstrate the inability of the state to establish consent widely, and counter official claims of 100% consensual land pooling for Dholera.

Instituting Dholera Smart City

The Gujarat SIR Act 2009 was enacted to institute "investment regions" and "investment areas" feeding growth along the DMIC. It enables the use of either the central land acquisition law, or the Gujarat Town Planning and Urban Development Act (GTPUDA), 1976 for land consolidation. Perhaps as a demonstration of commitment to voluntary land consolidation, or to avoid the pejorative connotations of forcible land acquisition (or both), the state government has preferred to invoke the latter in Dholera.[6] The town planning law has been historically used for the conversion of rural-agrarian land for the expansion of existing cities. Through the SIR Act, its scope has been widened to cover greenfield cities. Typically such cities are to be instituted as public–private partnerships between the state government and private investors and developers. Such partnership is conceived from the planning stages of Dholera.

The development plan for the Dholera SIR was developed by the UK-based global consultancy firm Halcrow for the Government of Gujarat in 2010 (Datta 2015), subsequently sanctioned and made operational by 2012. The global infrastructure giant AECOM was then awarded a $30 million five-year extendable contract by the DMIC Development Corporation in mid-2013, for full programme management services in Dholera. The Dholera SIR Authority is incharge of implementing the project phase-wise over 30 years, in three development phases of 10 years each. The authority plans to initially develop trunk infrastructure such as roads, water, sewage and power supply systems in an "activation zone" of 22.54 km^2 on land it already possesses.[7] The proposed land use in the Dholera smart city project includes residential, industrial, tourism, commercial, information technology, recreation sports and entertainment zones.

Under the provisions of the town planning law, land for the Dholera SIR is to be consolidated via a "pooling" mechanism: 50% of the land of each owner in the Dholera area is to be "deducted" at market price from the owners, the rest returned to the original owners as "developed" plots in redesignated zones under the new plan criteria. A betterment charge will be levied on the original owners for the provision of new infrastructure facilities, deducted from the compensation award for 50% of the land. In addition, each affected family is promised one job per family in the Dholera SIR. While the town planning law contains provisions for the participation of locals bodies and residents in the determination of compensation and award, it makes no provisions for ascertaining consent to land pooling for the project.

The land pooling mechanism is premised on the principle that the development authority in charge of undertaking planned urban development temporarily brings together a group of landowners for planning a region's development. As there is no "acquisition" or "transfer of ownership," the case for compensation does not arise, except for the proportion of the land "deducted" for basic infrastructure provision. The rest of the land remains with the original landowner, and the "benefit" of development in terms of the increment in land value after "development" accrues to the owner, rather than to the development agency. The original owner continues to enjoy access to the land without being "displaced" (Ballaney 2008). Setting aside the merits or demerits of this approach to brownfield urban expansion, the incorporation of the town planning law into the SIR Act in Gujarat for a greenfield industrial city poses a particular set of issues that the language of pooling and benefit obscures.

First, the extent of land required for a new city implies the loss of a far greater extent of land than in the course of expansion of an existing city. Second, with the re-zoning of land according to the new development plan, owners do not retain their original agricultural plots, and must relocate. Third, with the development of a new city (or the expansion of an existing city), even if village settlements are protected with buffer zones, conditions will invariably develop to prevent the old rural settlements to continue in the same form. This will force the original inhabitants to move, in search of livelihoods or as they are priced out, for more conducive living options. Fourth, with the disruption of the agrarian economy and the re-zoning and subdivision of plots, agricultural livelihoods face severe temporal and physical dislocation, and only large farmers with the holding power to wait the years for "development" of the re-zoned plots and with enough surplus land may retain their hold on cultivation and allied agricultural activities. Fifth, agrarian livelihoods and resources experience a severe downward pressure with the growth of industry, tourism, construction and other related economic activities. Sixth, with immediate attractive returns, the push is towards greater commodification of land, and income from rent, as opposed to existing productive agricultural activity, raising issues of food security and sovereignty. Finally, developing and returning 50% land to the original owners will presumably take a few years. In the intervening years, the livelihood and food security options available for local residents significantly dependent on land are unclear.

Under the GTPUDA, planning is to be undertaken in two phases: a development plan is to be prepared first for the entire area affected by the project followed by several Town Planning Schemes (TPS) for smaller portions of the development area. A draft plan is initially prepared and kept open for public inspection for two months, inviting objections and suggestions to its terms. The plan can then be modified and published again, inviting further objections and suggestions for incorporation. The state government may then suggest further modifications before the final plan is prepared. The TPS are the micro plans for the development of smaller areas as per the final plan, and each scheme similarly allows "consultation" and "participation" in its drafting and implementation. Despite these provisions for consultation regarding content, the plan and its schemes make no room for ascertaining consent for the proposed development.

In fact, there is an a priori assumption of consent built into the land pooling mechanism. As such, the mechanism falls far short of the principle of prior informed consent as well as decentralised and democratic decision-making in development processes in keeping with the 73rd Amendment Act (1992) provisions. This significant oversight is evident as the DSIR, and presumably other such greenfield city-making projects, will be developed through public–private partnerships. Under the 2013 land acquisition law, in public–private partnership projects, 70% consent of original landowners is required before a project can be undertaken. The pooling mechanism circumvents consent-based development through the disingenuous language of consultation and voluntary pooling.

Land Relations and Dissent

The 22 villages in the Dholera SIR area are a vibrant landscape of existing relations with land. The Velavadar National Park that has a blackbuck[8] sanctuary is adjacent to the DSIR. A thriving agrarian political economy cultivating rainfed wheat (the coveted *bhaliya ghaun* for which the region is known), cotton, cumin and jowar as well as rearing milch cattle complements livelihood strategies with other diverse occupations in the region, including diamond polishing. The majority community in the area are Koli Patels (61.8% of the population), who own a majority of marginal to medium landholdings that many received, ironically, through redistributive land reforms. The next community are the large landholding Darbars (Kshatriyas; 10.6%), followed by a smattering of other communities, including those dependent on commons like Bharwads (pastorals), Scheduled Caste (SC) communities, Muslims, and barely if any Scheduled Tribes (ST) (SENES 2013). Many milch cattle owning villagers are members of flourishing milk cooperatives in the area. Table 1 gives the total land area of the 22 villages under the DSIR.

According to official figures, dry-land farming is the source of livelihood for 79.3% of the local population, while 51.5% depend on livestock rearing and 24.8% on farm labour (being part of one livelihood category does not exclude overlaps with another; see Table 2 (p 62) also SENES 2013 for more details).

Table 1: Land Area of 22 Villages under DSIR

Sr No	Name of District	Name of Taluka	Name of Revenue Villages			
1	2	3	4			
			Sr No	Name of Village	Total Survey Nos	Total Area of Land in Sq Km
1	Ahmedabad	1 Dhandhuka	1	Bavaliyari	1,204	111.2724
			2	Bhadiyad	1,908	49.7331
			3	Bhangadh	620	83.0777
			4	Bhimtalav	223	7.4042
			5	Dholera	969	45.8145
			6	Gorasu	1,219	31.1763
			7	Kadipur	648	27.3509
			8	Khun	227	38.2968
			9	Mahadevpura	179	22.5431
			10	Mingalpur	261	33.0813
			11	Mundi	316	17.8054
			12	Otariya	801	18.0975
			13	Panchi	360	13.9638
			14	Rahatalav	336	63.4464
			15	Sandhida	517	18.6401
			16	Zankhi	389	22.0941
			17	Ambli	1,084	55.2044
			18	Cher	464	16.2436
			19	Gogla	385	55.4426
		2 Barwala	1	Hebatpur	1,086	72.6594
			2	Sangasar	790	35.4928
			3	Sodhi	588	40.4975
		Total			14,574	879.3377

Sources: DSIRDA (2013).

The literacy rates in the entire DSIR area are worth noting, with 35.1% of the population non-literate, 44.4% with primary education, 14.6% with secondary education, 3% higher secondary, and 2.9% with college education. As I recount below, several residents I interviewed in Bavaliyari and Ambli villages argued that agricultural work does not require specialised skills sets of the kind that other urbanised and industrial work may. The offer of one job per affected family will thus not compensate others in a family rendered without work. Residents expressed anxiety that losing land and commons to the Dholera SIR would render them without livelihoods and future security.

The 22 villages also fall within the Narmada River canal command and have been waiting for over a decade for canal water. The villages were "decommanded" in 2014 in the wake of the DSIR, but residents fought for reinstatement, and the area was subsequently "recommanded" in 2015. Recently, they have been "decommanded" once again. If the water reaches the villages, residents argue that the fertile soil will give them two or three yearly crops of wheat, cotton, cumin and jowar, enriching the local agrarian economy. Given existing skills, literacy and education levels, in nearly all interviews and meetings, irrespective of community and socio-economic status, residents expressed the desire for greater state support in strenghthening the existing agrarian economy with the provision of canals and other agrarian infrastructure to create overall prosperity and development in the region. I represent below key concerns articulated by residents across community and socio-economic status from Bavaliyari and Ambli Panchayats.[9]

Interviews

Champa *ben* Pratap Singh of Bavaliyari is a non-literate landless Koli Patel peasant who cultivates others' lands for 25%–30% share of produce with her husband, Pratap Singh. The couple have two school-going sons and a daughter. They have three buffaloes that suffice for their family's needs and allow for minor sale of milk. During an interview, Champa ben asked if non-literates like her would be given jobs in the new smart city with her skills of cotton picking, cleaning and growing other crops (interview 20 May 2015; translated from Gujarati).

Table 2: Livelihood Patterns in the DSIR Area

Village	No of Reported HH	Dry Land Farming	Livestock Rearing	Fishing	Poultry	Wood Sell	Charcoal	Farm Labour	Land Lease	Agriculture Employee
Inner-coastal zone										
Bavaliyari	408	299	355	0	0	0	0	96	10	125
Bhangadh	326	272	203	30	0	0	0	10	0	300
Bhimtalav	23	8	4	0	0	0	0	12	0	23
Khun	200	122	194	10	0	0	0	49	18	36
Mahadevpura	251	211	81	100	0	0	0	40	0	60
Mingalpur	556	185	203	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Rahtalav	443	378	307	50	0	0	0	110	0	0
Zankhi	186	80	46	163	0	0	0	50	0	85
% of total		65	58.2	14.8	0	0	0	15.3	1.2	26.3
Transitional zone										
Ambali	212	97	86	0	0	0	0	120	0	0
Dholera	591	217	152	0	0	0	0	302	0	0
Gogala	224	164	160	3	0	0	0	55	8	125
Hebatpur	677	623	471	0	0	15	4	108	30	0
Kadipur	133	88	92	10	0	5	0	56	20	0
Mundi	82	46	48	3	1	0	0	9	0	0
Panchi	123	123	116	10	10	a	16	0	9	0
Sandheda	158	114	100	0	0	0	0	0	7	9
% of total		67	56	1	1	1	1	30	3	6
Outer zone										
Bhadiyad	489	306	146	0	0	0	0	128	0	384
Cher	53	46	46	0	0	5	0	8	0	0
Gorasu	226	136	85	0	0	0	0	74	3	0
Otariya	240	218	82	0	0	0	0	15	55	0
Sangasar	177	171	118	0	0	0	0	11	61	0
Sodhi	373	358	325	0	0	0	2	150	150	0
Total	1,558	1,235	802	0	0	5	2	386	269	384
% of Total		79.3	51.5	0	0	0.3	0.1	24.8	17.3	24.6

Source: SENES (2013).

The SC community in Bavaliyari has a *mandali*, a collective landholding of around 500 acres allotted by the state that is divided among the SC households in the village for cultivation. Jayanti *bhai* Solanki has a 16 acre share in the mandali. He also bought 10 acres of land in 1982 and owns a tractor. One of his sons studies in college while the other farms, and three of his daughters are married. According to Manju ben, his wife, there should first be a clear guarantee of work for the locals, and then alone should land be taken by the state for a project. She added that the canal water from the Narmada will be of use to them and that "in the village there can be no development without farming." Even if one has to go out to a city for work temporarily, she pointed out, at least there is the security of land to return to in the village, while the city is too expensive to sustain oneself in. If an industry comes to the area, she asked, "What will we do in case it closes? On the land, we can grow food and eat and sustain other livelihood activities" (interview 20 May 2015; translated from Gujarati).

Similarly, Darshan bhai Chonchla from Bavaliyari is a Bharwad and reveals that he has approximately six acres as share in the 400 acres of land owned by the *gopalak* mandali (cowherder collective). He has 20 buffaloes and seven cows and reveals that there are around 5,000 cattle in the entire village. He asked, "If a company comes to the village, where will the cattle and people go? As we are not educated? How will we get jobs?" (interview 21 May 2015; translated from Gujarati).

Pradyumna Singh Chudasama, a large landholding Darbar with 54 acres of land (and an additional 35 acres in his wife's name) is a retired officer from the state education department from Bavaliyari and a key organiser in the anti-DSIR movement. Chudasama has collated details of the DSIR project through several applications under the Right to Information Act 2005 and maintains the documents and records of all project details, petitions, appeals, communications and relevant press cuttings for the Bhal Bachao Samiti. Chudasama is also involved in the writ petition challenging the DSIR in the Gujarat High Court. While taking me through his meticulously maintained files, Chudasama argued that agricultural work offers gainful employment to all people irrespective of their abilities and capacities. The aged as well as people with special physical and mental abilities can find gainful work in agriculture, but a factory will not hire everyone and will require specific skills sets. Several petitions have been made to the DSIR authorities and the state government requesting the cancellation of the project. According to Chudasama, the petitions of the villagers opposing the project have not been taken into account officially (interview 20 May 2015; translated from Gujarati).

Lalitaben Bana Jadav of Sarasla village in Ambli Panchayat is also a Koli Patel and has a small plot of about three acres as her husband Bana Jadav's share among three brothers. She used to work as an agricultural labourer but injured her back two years ago. Her husband works at a hotel on the highway outside the village and they have two sons and two daughters, one of whom is married. While performing her chores in the kitchen garden outside her house, she explained that they (the villagers) do not want a city and the women of the area will fight as the entire village is against giving the land to the project. If the project comes, she argued, people will die as what jobs will the uneducated get in the project? She argued that it is a lie that they will prosper with land values appreciating, as the land being allotted is close to the sea and flood prone. Besides, with a majority of the population in the area non-literate, she expressed scepticism about creating locally-owned tourism and other service-oriented businesses. She added that the farmers of the area need Narmada canal water to enhance productivity (interview 22 May 2012; translated from Gujarati).

Salimbhai Maru is a Muslim from Dodhiya Para in Ambli panchayat and shares about 40 acres of land with four brothers. He has five cows. In his interview he complained that the rate of compensation fixed for the 50% of land sought by the DSIR is very low at Rs 70 per bigha compared to the market price in the area of Rs 400 per bigha. Additionally, he raised the issue that if the other half of the land is to be developed and returned to the original owners in 15 years, what are people supposed to do for livelihood in the meanwhile (interview 22 May 2012; translated from Gujarati)?

Like Lalitaben above, several residents claimed that the developed plots allotted to them are within the flood-prone areas where they will not be able to live, graze cattle, or cultivate fields. Indeed, the development plan shows tourism and residential zones on areas reclaimed from the sea. Landless agricultural workers further pointed out that while they had no land to lose, the proposed project was unlikely to hire non-literate unskilled labourers and thus be of little aid in their development.

Residents opposed the complete economic overhaul of the region proposed by the DSIR, but they clearly did not argue that "development" is not important or necessary in the villages. Rather, they argued for the need to strengthen existing agrarian infrastructures and to develop other support mechanisms. The contest in Dholera is over defining the terms of development and its beneficiaries. As resistance brews, contingent alliances across caste, class, community and gender hierarchies coalesce, in confrontation with interests promoting the DSIR. While not radically egalitarian, these alliances nevertheless open possibilites for articulations of "development from below" (Sampat 2015a).

Dholera's 'Rentier Economy'

The final development plan for the DSIR reveals the active role of rent in the compensation envisaged in the project for landowners:

> The land owners provided with readjusted land would need to be trained to negotiate with the industry/developers for giving land for industrial use on lease rental basis rather than outright sale basis; or industrial houses setting-up industries could be encouraged to provide certain share-holding to the land owner. It would help the land owner to ensure regular income from the land allotted to them.

The Plan adds:

> The owners could also be encouraged to invest in housing and commercial uses to have an opportunity for rental incomes, for which people would need to be supported through appropriate capacity building measures (DSIRDA 2013: 150).[10]

Chudasama points out that in 2011 the revenue department sold land under its possession to the DSIR Development Authority at Rs 20 per m^2, and the SIR authority is now attempting to sell this land to industry at Rs 600 per m^2. The difference is retained by the development authority, creating a significant state tier in the rentier economy being instituted by the project. Added to this are other political and economic elite investing in land around Dholera in anticipation of future land price appreciation. By several local accounts, powerful politicians have already invested in the land around Dholera, presumably adding to the impetus behind the smart city project. While rent from real estate is anticipated, much like investment in industry, rent from land is an active constituent of the region's economic transformation. It is in the gap between the absence of investor interest and the anticipated future investments for rent, that a precarious rentier economy emerges as the driving force behind the Dholera smart city.

The significant role of interests within the state rentiering from land consolidation and acquisition processes has led some to describe the Indian state as a "speculative state" (Goldman 2011), a "land-broker state" (Levien 2012) or an "entrepreneurial state" (Datta 2015). However, as I discuss in my work elsewhere, interests within the state are often working at cross-purposes and respond to political contingencies and possibilities in complex ways (Sampat forthcoming). In this case, while rentiering interests within the state constitute an important tier in what I call the rentier economy, the state itself is not amenable to the descriptor "rentier state"; the rentier economy includes private actors, especially large landowners.

The City of Dholera Will Come Up, This Is as True a Fact That the Sun Will Rise Tomorrow…:[11] At the moment, there is little actual private investment on the ground in Dholera. State-level bureaucrats in charge of facilitating the development of Dholera claim that investors "will come only when there is something on the ground" (interview with Shardul Thakore of GICC; 29 April 2015). A highly-placed corporate source brokering land deals in the region reveals on request of anonymity that while several attempts have been made with advertisements and field-trips for investors from Dubai, Mumbai and elsewhere, no investor is interested in the area as there is "nothing" on the ground. The only "stray buyers" of land around the Dholera SIR are those parking excess money to gain from future appreciation, many allegedly powerful politicians or those who cannot afford to buy plots near Ahmedabad (interview 25 May 2015). Representatives of two prominent real estate developers I interviewed in Ahmedabad, Bakeri Group and Parshwanath Construction also expressed unwillingness to invest in Dholera due to lack of demand (interview 28 May 2015).

The Bhal Bachao Samiti, a committee with representatives of the 22 impacted villages, has been formed by local residents to resist the project with each village reportedly constituting a subcommittee. Hundred people were detained and 22 arrested in February 2014 when protesting land acquisition (*Indian Express* 2013; JAAG 2014b). Local residents have also filed a writ petition in the Gujarat High Court challenging the takeover of their productive agricultural land by the state under the GTPUDA. A recent high court order has stayed proceedings for land pooling as the matter is under consideration in the court (*Gujarat Khedut Samaj v Gujarat State 2015*).

The Gujarat Infrastructure Development Board (GIDB) is the apex authority under the SIR Act 2009 and functions as the regulatory board for all SIR projects in the state. In an interview, the chief executive officer of the GIDB claimed no knowledge of resistance in the DSIR area and further claimed that adequate public consultations had been undertaken in the region regarding the project (interview 29 April 2015). An official of the Gujarat Industrial Corridor Corporation (GICC, constituted in 2009 for the implementation of the DMIC projects in Gujarat) overseeing the DSIR described the project as a "nation-building exercise" and claimed that 140 public consultations had already been undertaken in the area, that include consultations in every village affected by the project. In my interviews, GICC officials initially claimed that people had been "educated" and any resistance had been addressed and resolved successfully. After some persistent questioning however, the officials conceded that if indeed there is opposition on the ground (the GTPUDA does not explicitly enable the use of force), the project may have to be cancelled (interview 29 April 2015). A town planning officer in Dholera at the DSIR authority office responsible for the implementation of a TPS also denied the presence of any local opposition in the DSIR villages and claimed that surveys were being successfully undertaken by a private contractor for the Town Planning Office to ascertain plot survey numbers and titles in the area (interview 22 May 2015).

My interviews with villagers run counter to these assertions. They claim that only preliminary meetings introducing the project were held in the area, and attendance was officially assumed to stand in for consent. They also maintain that no officials are being allowed to enter the DSIR villages and all official surveys stand suspended. Anxiety and opposition over loss of land and livelihoods in the region is palpable, the promises of transition to growth and prosperity for all seem unconvincing, and ongoing opposition renders the future of the project uncertain.

This opposition is located in the wider ferment over land in Gujarat and across the country. Not too far from Dholera, the 50,884 hectare Mandal-Becharaji SIR (MBSIR) in the Saurashtra region of Gujarat was one of the first "nodes" to begin implementation along the DMIC. It faced immediate resistance from the 44 villages coming under it (Shivadekar 2013). When agitations intensified, the then Chief Minister of Gujarat Narendra Modi, probably fearing electoral repercussions in a sensitive election year, cancelled the notification for 36 MBSIR villages.[12] The resistance to MBSIR was largely successful in forcing the state to withdraw in the face of electoral contingencies, a tendency witnessed in other states as well (Bedi 2013; Sampat 2015a).[13]

In the fraught landscape of widespread resistance to land acquisition over infrastructure projects across the country, especially in the last decade, public consultation and prior informed consent for development projects have assumed significance as never before. In 2015, this resulted in the failure of the ordinances and the amendment bill proposed to the central 2013 land acquisition law by the National Democratic Alliance (NDA) government.[14] In the aftermath of this failure, the NITI Aayog Vice Chairperson Arvind Panagariya has gone on record to suggest that state governments should rely on land pooling mechanisms for infrastructure development projects to avoid the "draconian" (compensation and consent) provisions of the 2013 land acquisition law (Sharma 2015). To suggest that the mechanism of pooling is an appropriate gauge for consent is misleading, if not outright disingenuous. It is unclear how the mechanism can consolidate land in the face of opposition to a project. The imagined futures that moor Dholera smart city are tenuous, and rife with possibilities of resistance and overthrow. These futures can then be pursued only with resort to force and violence by the state, that must in turn account for electoral contingencies.

Urbanisation Infrastructures and the Rentier Economy

According to the erstwhile Planning Commission of India:

> 300 million Indians currently live in towns and cities. Within 20–25 years, another 300 million people will get added to Indian towns and cities. This urban expansion will happen at a speed quite unlike anything that India has seen before. It took nearly 40 years for India's urban population to rise by 230 million. It could take only half the time to add the next 250 million (GOI 2013a).

India's policy impetus for urbanisation encompasses not just the outskirts of existing cities, but also new cities and urbanisation infrastructures in industrial corridors such as Dholera and Shendra-Bedkin (also along the DMIC), special economic zones (SEZs) such as the Mahindra World City and other public–private partnership initiatives such as the Andhra Pradesh's new capital city Amaravati. The destruction of existing productive agrarian relations in anticipation of rent from future investments is a developmental leap of the rentier model of growth emerging from capitalist logics of accumulation. Investments in urbanisation infrastructures are critical for the constant absorption and expansion of excess surplus value (in other words economic growth), and facilitate the "annihilation of space by time" for faster movements of goods, services, information and money flows (Harvey 1982; 2001). The diversification of several large global and domestic business houses and finance capital into housing, infrastructure and retail construction points to the significance and scale of this "fix" for capital, irrespective of the realisation of the promise of industrialisation. Investors and builders may or may not have direct stakes in potential productive linkages emerging from real estate creation (the small number of operational SEZs despite generous concessions is instructive).

The policy emphasis on urbanisation infrastructures relies on the rent-driven logics of land commodification. Differential rent accrues to land depending on its qualities, location, use(s) and existing infrastructures (Marx 1992; Lefebvre 2016). Differential rent from the conversion of agricultural land to urban infrastructures and real estate is reconfiguring the political economy of land in greenfield and brownfield urbanisation project areas. With the appreciation of land prices as projects are announced, some farmers thus "give up" land without resistance for immediate returns (Sampat 2015b). Agriculture is rendered less profitable; agrarian infrastructures and relations are devalued.

At the same time the capacity to profit from rentiering hinges on ownership or access to land. If agrarian relations are already skewed against the small peasantry,[15] growing rent from land commodification for urbanisation projects can only make inequalities worse. Active encouragement of rentiering accelerates downward pressure on existing agrarian relations, even in relatively fertile regions. The "creative destruction" of existing agrarian infrastructures and relationships unleashed by rentierism through urbanisation projects is, at best, officially unacknowledged and at worst, actively silenced.

Table 3: Share and Growth of Real Estate and Construction Sectors

	2000–01	2005–06	2006–07	2007–08	2008–09	2009–10	2010–11	2011–12	2012–13
Real estate, ownership of dwellings and business services	8.7 (7.5)	9.1 10.6)	9.3 (9.5)	9.6 (8.4)	10.3 (10.4)	10.4 (8.3)	10.4 (6.0)	10.8 (10.3)	
Construction	6.0 (6.1)	7.9 (12.8)	8.2 (10.3)	8.5 (10.8)	8.5 (5.3)	8.2 (6.7)	8.2 (10.2)	8.2 (5.6)	8.2 (5.9)

Source: Adapted from Central Statistics Office in GoI (2013b). Shares are in current prices and growth in constant prices. Figures in brackets indicate growth rates.

In his analysis of Indian land markets, Chakravorty (2013) argues that land prices in India have risen phenomenally and growing real estate prices reflect the rise in the price of land, given the construction costs have grown stably along the consumer price index. He points out that current urban land prices range from $833 to $33 million per acre[16] and the price of urban land has increased fivefold in the period 2001–11. Agricultural land prices in some rural areas have increased by a factor of five to 10 over the past decade, higher in urban peripheries than in interior districts.

Prices vary, Chakravorty suggests, along productivity and income from land, how active local land markets are, and the scarcity of land supply and fragmentation. These factors have combined with the post-liberalisation expansion of money supply to result in phenomenal land prices. Money supply has grown in this period through expanding credit markets, income growth for some sections (who in turn invest in land and property as status markers), rise in "black" money (see also Nijman 2000; Weinstein 2008), and foreign investment from non-resident Indians.

Chakravorty misses the crucial point that these are elite and precarious circuits of money supply fuelling rentier investments, without redistributive potential. If the official predictions of the massive movement of 300 million people from rural to urban areas over the next two decades bear out, there will be serious implications for dispossession and uprooting of rural populations, agrarian livelihoods and cultures, and large-scale land-use change with consequent conflict and stresses on the environment and food security.

Linkage Effects

Industrialisation plays a significant role in the imaginary of Dholera and the DMIC, yet it is worth noting that manufacturing in India has stagnated at 15% to 16% of the gross domestic product since 1980 (GoI 2011). Interestingly, in an interview with a senior industry representative in Ahmedabad, the industrialist candidly acknowledged that land and infrastructure are not the critical issues for boosting manufacturing as serious industrialists are not looking for concessions from the government. He pointed out that it is real estate interests that seek subsidised access to land from the state. What industry requires instead, he argued, is a focus on "soft infrastructures" and an easing of bureaucratic procedures and rules (interview 23 April 2015).

Even as manufacturing stagnates in the country, the construction sector is booming. The growing share of construction in the national economy underscores the significance of this sector. In 2011–12 the shares of real estate and construction together accounted for 19% of the Indian economy, growing from 14.7% in 2000–01 (GoI 2013b; see Table 3). More remarkably, in 2009–10, the construction sector formed the second largest employer of workers in India, employing 11% of the workforce after agriculture, which employed 36% (Soundararajan 2013). This growth further contextualises the recent policy push towards urbanisation infrastructures in India. Land, and by extension real estate, is "like gold with yield" in so-called emerging economies (cf Fairbairn 2014).[17]

A recent report by Cushman & Wakefield ranks India 20th among the current top real estate investment markets globally, with an investment of $3.4 billion in 2012 (*Economic Times* 2013). A study by Global Construction Perspectives and Oxford Economics further predicts that India will become the world's third largest construction market by 2025, adding 11.5 million homes a year to become a $1 trillion a year market (Sen 2013).

Foreign investments in real estate and land remain regulated. Global finance is unable to invest *directly* in housing, commercial and retail real estate projects. It is through partnership investments in urbanisation infrastructures (for smart cities, industrial corridors, and other public–private partnerships) that global finance fuels the rentier economy.[18] For instance, in addition to the involvement of global giants Halcrow and AECOM for Dholera mentioned earlier, other global partnerships to develop the DMIC infrastructure include Japanese loans, investment by Japanese firms and Japan depository receipts issued by Indian companies. A number of national, regional, state and local developers and consultants, along with fly-by-night operators, brokers and dealers out to make a quick buck, join the ranks in fuelling the rentier-driven commodification of land and built space.

Through categorisation into "barren lands" or "backward areas," existing agrarian relations and infrastructures are rendered "unproductive" discursively, so they can be converted to high-end urban enclaves. Official accounts often describe Dholera as "barren" and "backward"; bureaucrats used these terms in official presentations and interviews as well. Repeated claims that "there is nothing on the ground" by state officials and private developers disclosed bias against agriculture, and in favour of urbanisation. However, urbanisation infrastructures index rentier investments without "productive linkages" with industrialisation critical for wider distributive effects of transition.[19] In the absence of productive investment in industry, and the deeply unequal geography of rent, the peasantry emerges as an "absolute surplus population" (Smith 2011)[20] that is irrelevant to accumulation[21] in the rentier economy, except as obstacle.

The refusal of residents in the Dholera SIR region (and elsewhere) to consent to their dispossession by urbanisation infrastructures challenges these rentier-driven logics of accumulation. Interests within the state promoting urbanisation infrastructures must contend with electoral fallouts of such dissent, as evidenced in the MBSIR area. Meanwhile the rentier economy, with its elite circuits of money and rent, lack of productive linkages with industrialisation, challenges of access to land, and its sheer anticipated futures, is a precarious model of growth. Left unfettered, it will destroy existing productive agrarian relations and dispossess agrarian populations with little option for sustainable livelihoods, or food security.

NOTES

1 The DMIC itself spans 1,483 km and is officially expected to "impact" 180 million people across six states—Uttar Pradesh, Delhi, Haryana, Rajasthan, Gujarat and Maharashtra.

2 According to the then DMIC Chief Executive Officer Talleen Kumar, smart cities along the DMIC will have integrated communications technology as one of the components for improving life; infrastructure will operate through sensors sharing information in real time and this will make for efficiency. Smartness will include hard and soft infrastructure, including in areas like flood-control, drainage, sewage and drinking water provisions, developed with extensive back-office work in project development. Special Purpose Vehicles will be responsible for the implementation of the cities. Planned industrial cities will address the growth and employment needs of the country and turn India into a manufacturing and investment destination. They will address rural to urban migration and help pull thousands of people above poverty line (interview 13 May 2015).

3 In his work examining the Andhra Pradesh SEZ, Cross refers to special economic zones as "uniquely charged objects of conviction and anxiety" (2014: 4) that are "made into particular places for capital by planners and politicians, corporate managers and executives, farmers, workers and activists as they pursue different futures" (Cross: 5) built on an "economy of anticipation" (Cross: 6). My aim in invoking the anticipated nature of investments in Dholera is more modest, and points only to the tenuousness of the futures invoked by the planners and promoters of the project, in this case various state agencies and private planners.

4 It should be noted that while real estate plays a significant role in the *imaginary* of Dholera, real estate developers are not a driving force in its institution. This is different from many large and medium special economic zones that courted controversy as real estate grabs (see Banerjee-Guha 2008; Levien 2012; Jenkins et al 2014; Cross 2014; Sampat 2015a).

5 In most villages of the area, bureaucrats and state representatives attempting to conduct any official surveys for Dholera SIR are reportedly refused entry and sent back by the locals resisting the project.

6 There has been a phenomenal rise in the scale of protests against forcible land acquisition in the country in the past decade (see Basu 2007; Banerjee-Guha 2008; Levien 2012; Bedi 2013; Chakravorty 2013; Sampat 2013; Jenkins et al 2014). Jenkins et al (2014) also discuss the provisions of the 2013 land acquisition law as a response to these grievances (see also Sampat 2013).

7 The authority has thus far been unsuccessful in pooling any additional land owing to local opposition to the project. At the time of writing, proposals from global applicants for infrastructure development with integrated communications technology were under process.

8 Blackbucks are a species of antelope indigenous to the Indian subcontinent, and listed as "near threatened" by the International Union for the Conservation of Nature in its Red List since 2003. By law, the park has to be protected by a 10 km buffer zone around it, but the development plan violates this stipulation, focusing instead on providing wildlife crossings and flood mitigation as compensation measures to protect the wildlife of the area from the urban centre.

9 This is not to obscure caste, gender and other deeply entrenched pernicious hierarchies across communities in the area. However, as in other areas of such resistance, contingent alliances among unequal social forces are emerging under threat of dispossession.

10 The plan also reserves a token place for agriculture in the DSIR schema: "Facilitating agricultural training for improved productivity for farmers left with part of their agricultural land and extension of facilities for seeds and fertilisers for improved productivity" (DSIRDA 2013: 150).

11 A promotional video of the DSIR shows a futuristic city that looks like a sci-fi set with towers, bridges, a "global business hub," "multi-model transport systems," airport, sea ports, "entertainment zones," "smart homes" with "walk to work" model and more to the accompaniment of an eerie techno drumbeat. The video ends with the smiling face of Prime Minister Modi, and ends with the promise: "The city of Dholera will come up, this is as true a fact that the sun will rise tomorrow..." (see Artist2win 2013).

12 The remaining eight villages continue to resist the institution of a Maruti Suzuki automobile plant on the pasture lands of the traditional cattle-rearing *Maldhari* community. See *Indian Express* (2013).

13 Bedi (2013) argues that the fortunes of localised struggles are contingent upon "viewings of the accessible state" by social movement activists. While this is undoubtedly one of the factors aiding the success of resistance in some areas, anti-SEZ oppositions, for instance, have successfully mobilised despite violent repression, such as in Nandigram in West Bengal and Raigad in Maharashtra. In many of these areas, peasants' and citizens' groups risked their lives and livelihoods irrespective of state receptivity, to assert rights over land and resources (Sampat 2015a).

14 Two key controversial amendments proposed by the central government in the 2013 land acquisition law included the exemption of industrial corridors and SIRs from prior informed consent and social impact assessments.

15 Peasantry here refers to small and marginal landowning farmers with less than 10 and two acres of land respectively, landless agrarian workers, pastoralists, fisherfolk, forest dwellers and other petty commodity producers.

16 At dollar–rupee rate ₹60 = $1.

17 Fairbairn (2014) has used this phrase in relation with recent investments by global finance in agrarian land for agriculture. I extend her argument here to investment in land for rent from price appreciation and real estate development.

18 Such partnerships, however, are not without their problems. See Searle (2014) for conflicts over issues like land valuation, power, prestige and business practice that form critical stumbling blocks for international financing in infrastructure projects.

19 Hirschman defines "linkage effects" as "investment-generating forces that are set in motion, through input-output relations, when productive facilities that supply inputs to that line or utilise its outputs are inadequate or nonexistent. Backward linkages lead to new investment in input-supplying facilities and forward linkages to investment in output-using facilities" (1981: 65).

20 Smith (2011) argues that the growing impoverishment of people confronted with capitalist growth is creating an absolute surplus population that can no longer engage in a "politics of negotiation" to the terms of a project, but instead create a non-negotiable "counterpolitics" of resistance.

21 Levien (2012) finds a similar indifference to local populations in the institution of the Mahindra World City in Rajasthan albeit without alliances of resistance to the project.

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