Amaravati

Speculation and Uncertainty in the New Capital City of Andhra Pradesh, India

Dag Kolstø

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Department of Social Anthropology
University of Oslo

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Preface

Outside the primary school in the village of Penumaka, a meeting is being held with government officials and a group of villagers. The topic is the project for developing a new capital city for the state of Andhra Pradesh. Speaking from the podium, representatives from the CRDA (Capital City Development Authority) present their case to a group of over one hundred men—mainly landowning farmers—sitting in the shade of a large awning. For the past two years, most of these farmers have remained opposed the capital-city project despite continuous government pressure to give up their land. Now they have gathered to hear the government present a report assessing the social impact of the project.

Sitting among these farmers, I recognize many of them, like Srinu Reddy, Rajendra Reddy and Satish Reddy, who all own some three to five acres of fertile agricultural land and belong to the dominant Reddy caste. In addition, there are a few representatives from the Communist Party and the labor unions. While the panel present the findings of the report, the men sit quietly there—but the atmosphere is definitely tense.

The panel of official representatives consists of a CRDA official, the village president and two representatives from a private company that the CRDA had contracted to prepare the social impact assessment report. The only person on the podium critical to the government’s capital-city project is Alla Ramakrishna Reddy (henceforth: R.K.), from the opposition party.

When the CRDA official presents his perspective on the project and its social impact, there are angry comments from the crowd, but R.K. assures them with gestures that he will confront the government officials for them. When it is his turn to speak, R.K. presents crushing criticisms of the report prepared by the private company. Holding a copy of the report up between his thumb and forefinger, as if it smelled bad, he declares: “It is incomplete in all ways. Where are the agricultural workers [in the report]? (…) Who are these people who have made this report? What is your role? Have you investigated how many trees and how
many animals are affected? Did you inform the public about the report? The information is neither correct nor properly communicated. Did you take into account the [court] cases regarding the capital-city project?” The crowd cheers and applauds. R.K. then yields the floor to the CRDA official, who replies that he had posted all necessary information on the notice board in the panchayati (village council) office. To this, R.K. points out that the report was written in English, with only the notifications about land acquisition translated into the regional language, Telugu.

“The land classification has not been done properly.” R.K. continues. According to the report prepared by the private company, 1,134 landowners had not given their lands, 725 acres in total, to the officials in Penumaka, despite the government notification under the Land Acquisition Act (2013). In the report, all of that land was identified and classified as “dry” land, which means that the government can acquire it under the terms of that Act. However, the agricultural land in Penumaka is in fact multi-cropped, irrigated land—“wet” land—which, under normal circumstances, cannot be appropriated under the Act. A representative from the private company explains that they had classified the lands as “dry” on the basis of earlier reports, the Revenue Survey Records dating from 1908. The CRDA official notes, as if to back up the claim, that these records are over a hundred years old. However, the farmers seem to take this as indicating that the records are outdated. “Who asked you to use these reports?” asks a farmer in the audience. “The Collector” says the CRDA official. “Then get the Collector!” replies the farmer—but the CRDA Collector is not present. “How did you decide that this land is dry land when the groundwater is 20 feet under the ground?” asks another farmer in the audience.

To demonstrate the point, R.K. then reads out a name from the list of 1,134 landowners who had been notified for land acquisition in the report and whose lands have been classified as “dry” lands. A man in the audience replies to the name, and R.K. asks him, “How many crops do you cultivate in your fields each year?” The farmer responds that he cultivates three crops a year on 6.3 acres of land. In other words, this is irrigated, multi-crop land, which should have been classified as “wet,” not “dry,” land. In addition, the farmer says he had not been notified that the government wanted to acquire his land. R.K. explains that his acreage had been marked for land acquisition, but that the government cannot expropriate multi-crop land, like his, under the terms of the 2013 Land Acquisition Act.

Again, R.K. invites the CRDA official to explain, and now the official says, reluctantly, that he might have to change the classification in the report. But this statement seems to agitate the farmers even further. A member of the audience interrupts him saying, “do you
have the right to do that?!” Another farmer stands up and yells, “The CRDA office is a real-estate office!” An angry man from the Dalit community runs up to the podium and shouts at the officials for not notifying his community about this meeting. Other angry farmers and dissidents follow him, lining up in front of the podium and berating the panel. One farmer takes the microphone and yells at the representatives from private company, “tell me, is my land ‘dry’ land or ‘wet’ land? Tell me!” The leader of the agricultural workers’ union leader stands in front of the podium and shouts into a microphone: “ee pustukam tadhaka unndhi” (“this report is all wrong”).¹ He says that the CRDA had promised free education, free health, loans of up to 2,500,000 rupees for unemployed people and skill development for workers in the new capital region, but none of this has been implemented. “Everything you do is wrong!” he says. The government officials sit quietly, listening to the angry criticisms.

The meeting is unraveling, becoming chaotic. A group of farmers take a copy of the report from the podium and burn it demonstratively in front of the audience, while news journalists and others take pictures. As the situation gets increasingly out of control, a few policemen appear on the scene. They stand around the crowded podium and observe silently as the panel is inundated with complaints. In the disorganized situation it is hard to tell where police officers have come from. Someone in the line of angry farmers around the podium asks, “Who called the police? You don’t scare us!” Eventually, the panel members get up from their chairs and exit through the crowd of angry farmers.

¹ Tadhaka is a concept from weaving, in which if there is one error then the entire pattern becomes wrong.
1. Introduction

“Kannathali bhumi okkatey”—Telugu proverb, “the land is like our mother.”

“We are still dependent on agriculture, but we have to learn new innovative methods, like business in order to adjust. We have to leave our ancestors’ traditions.”

- Palepu Ramarao, Kamma entrepreneur and former TDP politician.

The incidents described above, which occurred on December 13, 2016, are indicative of several aspects relating to the dynamics unfolding since it was announced that the government would build a greenfield capital city in Guntur district in Andhra Pradesh almost three years ago. My research has focused on the social impact of this capital-city project, particularly how landless workers in the region are affected, so I found it odd that very few members from the Dalit community in Penumaka had come to attend this meeting, which concerned the social impact of the capital-city project. The project directly affects this community because most Dalits in this village depend on agricultural work—which according to the government’s plans will vanish with the development of the capital city.

I was also interested in exploring the dynamics between the landowners and the government, and the events of this meeting illustrate the disagreements between government officials and opposing farmers. The meeting was designed, as per the law, to inform the community, but instead the officials used the opportunity to put pressure on the opposing farmers and show that the government could take the land against their will. The fact that the CRDA held a meeting where it declared to the landowners that their lands were “dry” land and not “wet” land testifies to the hubris of the government. That approach did not sit well with the farmers, who were substantial in numbers and well organized. The result was an angry confrontation which the officials countered by deploying police personnel, in order to remind the farmers of the government’s “monopoly on violence.” The meeting ended in deadlock, with the situation between the government and the opposing farmers increasingly uncertain as regards the remaining land in Penumaka.

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2 A concept from software: the project is built from scratch without any interference from earlier work.
Research questions

In “Land Wars and the Great Land Grab” (2014: 40), Dr. Vandana Shiva writes: “For farmers, soil is not a prison from which they need to escape to an industrial job. It is their support, their means of livelihood, their security, their identity.” She argues that the speculative nature of global capitalism has exacerbated the tendency to alienate farmland for corporate profit, and the corporatization of agriculture has made farming less economically viable.

In this thesis I explore the validity of this argument as it relates to a contentious situation in the southeast Indian state of Andhra Pradesh, where the state government aspires to build a new state capital, on what has been fertile farmland. The state government has already procured over 30,000 acres of privately owned farmland through a voluntary Land Pooling Scheme, initiated on January 1, 2015.

It may seem unlikely that so much agricultural land has been surrendered voluntarily to the government, because farmers in Andhra Pradesh often emphasize their strong relation to the land. Representatives of the government, however, claim that farmers in the region wanted to abandon agriculture, because it is unprofitable and because the capital-city project will lead to rising prices for their land. Critics, however, argue that the government employed a wide range of strategies to entice and intimidate farmers to part with their land for the development of the new state capital. There is also the question of the members of the landless working class, who were not asked if they wanted to participate in this capital-city project, but who were nonetheless drawn into it.

I investigate the dynamics of the capital-city project, asking 1) why do some landowners decide to surrender their land to the government under the Land Pooling Scheme, while others resist it? 2) how has the project affected the local population, depending on their status?

In introducing the historical background, I focus on the caste-class composition in the region, to show that socio-economic inequalities in the villages of the region are highly correlated with caste composition. I argue that the state government has targeted prosperous landowning communities, and in particular to the dominant Kamma caste, for support for the capital-city project. My investigation shows the state government has resorted to extrajudicial and unethical methods of threats, intimidation, misuse of police force, and repeated spreading of misinformation in connection with the Land Pooling Scheme. Much of this thesis is devoted to documenting these violations, because these issues have been widely ignored in the regional and national discourse on the Amaravati capital-city project.
Caste-class structure in the region

Understanding the dynamics of the capital-city project necessitates exploring the demographic landscape, in which structures of caste and class play a major role. I discuss the caste-class composition of the region, and then show how these castes and classes responded differently to the project when first confronted with it, in December 2014.

I use the term “speculative” regarding the project, because not much construction has taken place in the proposed capital region in the three years that have passed since the inception of the project, but there have been many speculations and ideas as to how the city will look. Speculation, in other words, refers to what Appadurai (2013) calls “the politics of probability,” in which the state government seeks to market the capital-city project through the use of affective coding, risk management and accounting for future profit.

The Kamma caste

When the capital-city project was officially announced in December 2014, it was decided that the core region of the city would stretch over an area that covered 29 villages between the two cities of Guntur and Vijayawada, on the western side of the Krishna River in Guntur District, in a wider region often referred to as Coastal Andhra. These 29 villages extend over three mandals (administrative divisions): Thullur, Mangaligiri, and Tadepalli.3

The proposed region for the capital city lies predominantly within Thullur mandal, which is dominated by the Kamma landowning caste (Vakulabharanam and Prasad 2017: 72; Upadhya 2017: 188). To say that a village or a region is “dominated” by a caste means that members of this caste own most of the land in the region and dominate the local economy (see Srinavas 1969; also Benbabaali 2017: 2). Kammams in this region belong, generally but not always, to

the class which Carol Upadhya (1988) refers to as “the farmer-capitalists of Andhra Pradesh.” She argues that this class emerged as regionally dominant because of its “monopoly over agricultural land” (Upadhya 1997: 174).

Within this region, it would be an exaggeration to say that this class has a “monopoly over agricultural land,” but they certainly own most of it. Purendra Prasad argues that 60–65% of the land is owned by 16–18% of the population in this region, while 80% of the population own very small landholdings. According to Dalel Benbabaali (2017: 8), whereas the Kammas comprise 40% of the agricultural population of the Krishna Delta, they own 80% of its fertile land. The part of the planned capital city which lies in Thullur mandal is considered “Kamma heartland” (Still 2013: 71). Most of the agricultural land not situated close to the Krishna River is categorized as “dry” (metta) land. Although some villages not directly by the river do get water through lift irrigation, these farmers generally do not cultivate crops during the summer monsoon season (yenda kalam).

Landowning communities in Coastal Andhra have consolidated power since the late 19th century, but most researchers focus on the beginning of the Green Revolution in the 1960s and 1970s in explaining the formation of an economically dominant class of landowning castes (Upadhya 1997: 174; Srinavasulu 2002: 13; Prasad 2015: 78; Benbabaali 2017: 9). Landowning castes benefitted tremendously from the introduction of new technology and the commercialization of agriculture—especially the Kammas, because they had the start-up capital to invest in the new technologies (Benbabaali 2017: 9). But, as Upadhya (1997: 171) points out, it is not that “the dominant class of coastal Andhra is comprised solely of Kammas, nor that all Kammas belong to the dominant class.” There are other dominant landowning castes, such as the Reddy and the Kapu, which belong to the class of farmer-capitalists who have also benefitted from the Green Revolution (Srinavasulu 2002:13).

What characterizes families from this class is that they have diversified their profits from agricultural production into other industries, like IT, real estate or the movie industry, in neighboring cities and towns. The Telugu movie industry in Hyderabad, for example, has always been dominated by Kamma directors, producers and actors (Srinavasulu 2002: 13; Benbabaali 2017: 11). However, members of the “farmer-capitalist” class also keep in contact with their native villages. They still depend on relatives to take care of the farm, and the income from the agricultural produce remains an important source of income (Upadhya 1988: 1437; 2017: 182).

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4 Interview with Purendra Prasad November 11, 2016; see also Prasad (2015: 80) for figures on the entire Coastal Andhra region.
Rich, landowning Kammas started to consolidate economic power and political power in 1983, when Nandamuri Taraka Rama Rao (popularly known as NTR) founded the Telugu Desam Party (TDP) and won the state elections five months later (Benbabaali 2017: 10). NTR, a very popular actor from the Kamma caste, he swept the political scene as an alternative to the Congress Party. His son-in-law, Chandrababu Naidu, also of the Kamma caste, was the Chief Minister between 1995 and 2004, and was re-elected in 2014 from the TDP. When the government announced that the new capital city of Andhra Pradesh would be built in this region, the news was welcomed by members of the farmer-capitalist class of the Kamma caste in Thullur mandal, who had much to gain from the resultant hike in real-estate prices on the agricultural land (Ramachandraiah 2016: 71).

The Reddy caste

Another landowning caste belonging to the prosperous farmer-capitalist class in Coastal Andhra is the Reddy caste. Their stronghold is in the Rayalaseema region (Benbabaali 2017: 8), but in the region of the proposed new capital, they are particularly dominant in three villages: Penumaka, Undavalli and Nidamarru. These three Land Pooling Scheme villages are quite large, with very fertile, multi-crop agricultural lands: “wet” (jareebu) land. Farming communities in these villages managed to thrive even after the 1991 liberalization of the Indian economy, which rolled back agricultural subsidies and support and thus made it increasingly difficult and risky to be a farmer (Goldman 2011: 244).

The Reddy caste had been politically dominant in the leadership of the Congress Party on the state level since the formation of the united state of Andhra Pradesh in 1956 (Srinavasulu 2002: 7). Its dominance was challenged in 1983 with the emergence of the Telugu Desam Party. When the Congress Party lost popular support, the Reddy caste continued to influence party politics via another emergent regional party, an offshoot of the Congress Party known as YSRCP (Yuvajana Shramika Rythu Congress Party). Today, the rivalries between Kammas and Reddys are expressed primarily in connection with party politics. Of course, there are other castes which also support each of these parties at elections, but the support base comes principally from the Kamma caste or Reddy caste, respectively.

5 Although I cannot rely on peer-review literature to substantiate this claim, I know it for a fact on the basis of five months of fieldwork in the region.

6 According to the 2011 government census, the population of Penumaka was 7,918; Undavalli, 9,743; and Nidamarru 6,196.
When it was announced that the core capital city would be built in the region which included Nidamarru, Undavalli, and Penumaka, this met with immediate resistance from members of the Reddy caste in the three villages. Government officials dismissed the resistance as “opposition for the sake of opposition”—that the opposition party, YSRCP, was undermining the capital-city project for political gains. However, Reddy-caste farmers in these three villages gave me at least three quite different reasons for opposing the project. Firstly, while land prices in other parts of the proposed capital region had mushroomed with the announcement of the capital-city project, real estate prices in these three villages had fallen significantly (Vakulabharanam and Prasad 2017: 75–76). The reason for the decrease in Undavalli and Penumaka had to do with close proximity to Vijayawada. As Vijayawada grew, real-estate prices in Undavalli and Penumaka, situated on the opposite side of the Krishna River, increased steadily. When the capital-city project was announced, the real estate market for the entire region levelled out, and the price of agricultural land became approximately the same in all 29 villages.

Secondly, many of the farmers who were against the capital-city project emphasized in speaking with me that it was not for political or economic reasons that they opposed the project. They gave reasons that were more emotional or sentimental, emphasizing that their “land is like their mother” (kannathali bhumi okkatey)—a common saying among farmers throughout India (Shiva 2014: 40)—and that their land is ancestral land which cannot be bought or sold, but which they intend to pass on to their children and their grandchildren. They felt proud of their work in producing food, and emphasized the importance of food security. One Reddy farmer in Penumaka asked me rhetorically, “if they build buildings here, can we eat the buildings?” I have walked around the fields with impassioned farmers who picked vegetables for me to see, and pointed out the wonders of cultivation: the quality of their vegetables, the beauty of the greenery and the peace and quiet of the natural surroundings.

Thirdly, land can also be used as collateral for loans in the bank and very often serves as dowry (Upadhya 1988: 1437). Investments in agricultural land are considered financially sound, whereas investments in the capital-city project may not be so safe, because the prospects of the whole project hinge on wider political realities—such as the upcoming state elections, financial support from the central government, and the perceived capacity and competence of the state government to implement its ideas.

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7 Interview with the village president of Penumaka, Panakala Reddy, August 14, 2016.
The Dalit castes

There are some important differences between the castes of the farmer-capitalist class and the Dalits, who comprise the lower-class section of rural societies in Coastal Andhra. “Dalit” is a relational term which refers to “oppressed” groups, but is rarely used among these people themselves (Still 2014b), unless they are Dalit activists (Deliege 2010). It is a problematic term which I nonetheless choose to use in this thesis in referring to the castes which fall under three categories—Scheduled Caste (SC), Scheduled Tribe (ST), and Other Backward Castes (OBC)—because members of these categories are materially disadvantaged and marginalized in India (Madheswaran and Attewell 2007). Many anthropologists (e.g. Still 2014b; Deliege 2010; Frøystad 2010) prefer to restrict the use of the term “Dalits” to the SC category, because it refers to the former “untouchable” castes in the hierarchical cosmology of Hinduism, but I include the ST and the OBC categories as “Dalits” because my focus is on the intertwining of the modern dynamics of caste hierarchy with class inequality in Andhra Pradesh.

Clarinda Still, who conducted fieldwork in the same region as I did in Coastal Andhra on the banks of the Krishna River between 2004 and 2005, studied the dynamics of caste, class, and gender in a village she calls Nampalli. Although her village was not situated in the proposed capital region and was not confronted with the capital-city project, it is still useful to refer to her ethnography when describing the class-caste structures in the region. In “Nampalli”, as in the villages of the proposed capital region, most Dalits did not own land, but worked as agricultural laborers and tenants, dependent on either daily wage labor or tenancy from upper-caste landowning farmers (Still 2009; 2011; 2013; 2014a; 2014b). Even though the economic and social conditions for Dalits have improved considerably since independence, they are still materially deprived and are situated at the bottom of the social hierarchy in relative terms (Still 2013: 71). According to Still (2008), nearly half of rural Dalit households (48%) are classified as below the poverty line, and 22% live in conditions of severe poverty.

However, not all Dalits are poor. In Penumaka, for example, there are Dalits in government jobs and Dalits who own land—just as there are marginal Kamma farmers and there are landless Kammas. Even so, there is a correlation between caste and class in the region, with most Kammas and Reddys belonging to the prosperous farmer-capitalist class and most Dalits belonging to the landless working class (Still 2013: 71). Thus, I refer to the
“farmer-capitalist” class as an upper-caste class grouping and the Dalit class as a lower-caste class grouping.

In Penumaka, where I conducted fieldwork, the village is divided between the uru, where members of the upper caste-class reside, and the palli, where the Dalits live. This phenomenon is known throughout India, and is often referred to as “India’s apartheid” (Still 2014b). Still (2014b: 17–18) notes that the line which separates the Dalit quarters from the non-Dalit quarters of villages in India is referred to as the “pollution line,” and is seen as “a liminal space between the outside wilderness of nature and ghosts, and the civilized interior of the main village, the uru” (Still 2011a: 1123). However, she explains elsewhere that today the separation is rarely justified on the basis of assumed Dalit “polluted-ness”, but rather in terms of socio-economic, cultural and political differences (Still 2014: 18).

The line which separates the palli from the uru in Penumaka, I argue, is a class line, which, more than separating Dalits from non-Dalits, separates the lower class from the upper class, and the landless workers from the landowning farmers. The palli is markedly poorer than the uru, with lower houses, narrower roads, and fewer facilities. I was often told that “in the olden days” the Dalit quarters were situated on the village periphery because Dalits ate carcasses from animal sacrifices that upper-caste people would dump on the “pollution line.”

Today, such practices of “caste as hierarchy,” rationalized with concepts of purity/pollution, have become de-legitimized, replaced by conceptions of “caste as identity” (Still 2013: 69). Frøystad (2010), however, notes a tendency which she calls re-legitimization of caste discriminatory practices against Dalits on the basis of the government’s reservation system for marginalized castes; Still (2013) has shown that this tendency is found also in Andhra Pradesh.

In Penumaka today, caste groups live together in village neighborhoods, due to endogamous marriage practices and because of a sense of mutual cultural and social solidarity. Still (2013: 71) and Upadhya (1997: 184) observe that there is strong solidarity within the Kamma caste, across obvious class differences, but I have also observed class solidarity in Penumaka beyond caste differences. On the village periphery, in a neighborhood called Kothuru (“new village” in Telegu)\(^8\), many different castes live together in relative harmony. Most of the residents belong to the Madiga caste, but there are many STs of the Lambadi caste, and many people from various castes within the OBC category, as well as people from the upper castes, such as Reddys, Kammas, and Kapus. Those from the upper

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\(^8\) Telugu is the regional language in the states of Andhra Pradesh and Telengana, with approximately 85 million native speakers.
castes are either landless or marginal farmers, who own perhaps one acre of agricultural land, and they interact with landless workers and marginal farmers from different castes without any distinction or attitudes of superiority. Once I was speaking with a group of male agricultural workers of various castes. One was a Kamma who did not own any land. He said, “We are the poorest of the poor, but we are all the same.”

When the capital-city project was announced, landless Dalits were not asked if they supported the development of the capital city in their region, but were dragged into it nevertheless. Most observers who analyze the social impact of the capital-city project emphasize that members of the landless working class have suffered the most, losing their main source of income: agricultural work. Nonetheless, the Dalit communities in the region have not opposed the capital-city project in any comprehensive way since its inception.

**Introducing the capital-city project**

The story of Amaravati started when the state of Andhra Pradesh was split in two and Telengana State came into existence. The struggle for statehood in Telengana, known as the “Telengana movement,” dates back to 1969 (Weiner 1978: 217; Benbabaali 2016: 188), and finally succeeded in 2014, when the central government led by the Congress Party agreed to divide the state in two. With that decision Andhra Pradesh lost its capital city, Hyderabad—a tremendous blow to the population of residual Andhra Pradesh, both economically and emotionally (Ramachandraiaih 2016: 70). This population strongly opposed the decision to bifurcate the state, because many Andhra entrepreneurs of the prosperous farmer-capitalist class had invested in and around Hyderabad (Benbabaali 2016: 189; Upadhya 2017: 185). Hyderabad had been the capital of Andhra Pradesh for six decades, and a center for IT-related business since the 1990s (Ramachandraiah 2016: 69). Kammas had been major beneficiaries of this development, because when the TDP government under Chandrababu Naidu developed HITEC City (Hyderabad Information Technology Engineering Consultancy City), it was located near the residential areas where most of the Kammas in Hyderabad lived, and brought a rise in land values (Benbabaali 2017: 11). In addition, the government of the new state lost considerable amounts of revenue in Hyderabad. Telengana (including Hyderabad)

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9 Interview with Ramachandraiah, November 26, 2016; and interview with Purendra Prasad, November 11, 2016. See also Upadhya (2017: 193).

10 The name Amaravati comes from the ancient Satavahana dynasty, but is also the name of a small town 25 kilometers distant from the proposed sit of the new capital city (Ramachandraiah 2016: 68).
generated 69% of state revenues in 2012–2013, whereas Coastal Andhra generated 24% and Rayalaseema 7% of state revenues that year (Ramachandraiah 2016: 69–70).

The loss of Hyderabad was also an emotional loss. As the President of the Amaravati Land Pooling Farmers Federation of the Capital told me:

The capital has become a necessity, not by design, but by default. The state, against the wishes of the majority of the people, was divided into two, with the capital city of the so-called “new” state of Telengana and the original state of Andhra Pradesh was left with no capital. It has hurt the sentiments, the feelings, the pride of each and every citizen of the state of Andhra Pradesh.\(^{11}\)

The loss of Hyderabad was seen not only as a loss in terms of employment, business, and revenue: the people of Andhra Pradesh had lost a city which they had built with capital from Coastal Andhra (Upadhya 2017: 185–186). The emotional factor of this loss was often projected in the media, which might have reinforced these sentiments.\(^{12}\) When TDP was re-elected in 2014 to form a coalition government together with BJP (Bharatiya Janata Party), the Chief Minister Chandrababu Naidu pledged that he would build a “world-class” city, “the people’s capital,” that would be as good as or even better than Hyderabad (Ramachandraiah 2015: 10; Upadhya 2017: 187). This feeling of loss and of hurt pride expressed by the President of the Amaravati Land Pooling Farmers Federation of the Capital also helps to explain some of the initial support for the capital-city project.

Initially, there was massive speculation as to where the new capital city would be situated. In October 2014 the state government announced their choice of Thullur mandal, covering 14 villages. As mentioned, in this region most of the agricultural land is owned by Kammams of the farmer-capitalist class, who benefitted greatly from this announcement (Benbabaali 2017: 23).

The central government introduced the Reorganization Act (2014), outlining how the state would be bifurcated. Under this Act (Part II, 6.), a committee had been constituted by the central government “to study the various alternatives regarding the new capital for the successor State of Andhra Pradesh.” This committee, headed by K.C. Sivaramakrishnan, is usually referred to as the “Sivaramakrishnan committee.” In August 2014, the committee submitted its report, in which they warned against building a single greenfield city, especially in the area between Guntur and Vijayawada. The report argued that Krishna, Guntur and West

\(^{11}\) Interview with members of the Amaravati Land Pooling Farmers Federation of the Capital, November 27, 2016.

\(^{12}\) Interview with Purendra Prasad, November 11, 2016.
Godavari districts contain some of the best agricultural lands in the India: providing more than one percent of the country’s rice production, this area is often called the “rice bowl of India” (Sivaramakrishnan et al. 2014: 11). Instead, the committee proposed establishing a decentralized capital which could have administrative centers in various districts throughout Andhra Pradesh. The state government, however, dismissed this proposal, announcing that the capital city would be built on the area of 29 villages between Guntur and Vijayawada, by the Krishna River.

However, the government could not simply expropriate the land. Growing opposition to state governments’ practice of “land grabbing” all over India had led the central government to adopt a new Land Acquisition Act (full title: the Right to Fair Compensation and Transparency in Land Acquisition, Rehabilitation and Resettlement Bill, 2013). This 2013 Land Acquisition Act replaced the previous colonial Land Acquisition Act from 1894; although activists were disappointed, the 2013 Act was substantially better for landowners and people affected by industrial projects than its predecessor (Nielsen and Nilsen 2014).

Implementation of this Land Acquisition Act made it very difficult for the government of Andhra Pradesh to acquire land in the region it had announced for the development of the capital city. Even with the project defined as “public purpose,” the government would still need 70% consent from the local population and could not acquire any multi-crop land. That meant that the entire belt along the riverbank, with its fertile alluvial soil, could not be expropriated under the new Land Acquisition Act.

**The Land Pooling Scheme (LPS)**

Since the state government could not, under the terms of the Land Acquisition Act, simply expropriate the land that it wanted for construction of the capital city, it introduced an alternative strategy: a Land Pooling Scheme (LPS). Such schemes had been used by various state governments in India before for smaller projects, but never on a scale like the Amaravati capital-city project (Ramachandraiah 2016: 70). The Land Pooling Scheme for the capital-city project was officially introduced on January 1, 2015 within the Capital Region Development Authority Act (CRDA Act [2014]).

This LPS was introduced as a voluntary scheme, whereby landowners could transfer their land to the government for the purpose of developing the new capital city of Andhra Pradesh. In return, they would receive re-constituted residential and commercial plots within the new capital region. The size of these plots would depend on the classification of the land
in question (“dry” or “wet” land). For one acre of “dry” land, the landowner would receive 1,000 square yards as residential plot and 200 square yards as commercial plot. For one acre of “wet” land, the landowner would receive 1,000 square yards as residential plot and 300 square yards as commercial plot. In addition, landowners would receive an annual compensation of 30,000 rupees for one acre of “dry” land or 50,000 rs for one acre of “wet” land, for ten years.

The Land Pooling Scheme identified another category of landholdings, “assigned land.” This is land assigned to landless poor people belonging to the SC, ST, and OBC categories, by previous governments for the purpose of cultivation. Owners of assigned land are to be compensated with smaller re-constituted plots, but with the same amount of money. The government has now acquired most of the assigned land in the new capital region—but very few assigned landholders have been compensated, because the government has not been able to determine the rightful deed-holders.

The government also pledged to give 2,500 rupees each for month for ten years, to households that did not own any land, because landless agriculturalists—agricultural workers and tenant farmers—would lose their source of income as a result of agricultural land being transferred to the government under the LPS.¹³ Dalit advocate organizations, like the Dalit Bahujan Front (DBF), hold that it was because of their demands that the government agreed to grant a monthly “pension” of 2,500 rupees to landless, poor households.¹⁴ However, the sum is meagre in comparison with what agricultural workers earned before the capital-city project started. Vakulabharanam and Prasad (2017: 72) estimate that male agricultural workers in the region earned 12,000 rupees per month, and female agricultural workers earned 8,000 rupees per month.

Officially, the Land Pooling process went smoothly, without much resistance from farmers or from the landless agricultural workers in the capital region (Vakulabharanam and Prasad 2017: 71). In August 2015, the Capital Region Development Authority (CRDA) announced that it had procured 31,000 acres of the 33,000 acres of agricultural land necessary for the construction of the capital city (ibid.). This seems puzzling because, as explained above, farmers in Andhra Pradesh are deeply attached to their agricultural land. How did the government manage to convince farmers owning altogether 31,000 acres of agricultural land to relinquish it under a voluntary scheme? Why was there so little resistance from the landless

¹³ Interview with Prabakhara Reddy, former Director for IT and Social Development for the CRDA, November 18, 2016.
¹⁴ Interview with Bhagya Rao, National Secretary for Dalit Bahujan Front, November 13, 2016.
communities in the region, who arguably suffer the most from the project? The answer is complicated and requires closer elaboration.

**Strategies of persuasion**

The large landowners belonging to the “farmer-capitalist” class in Thullur mandal, especially those of the Kamma caste, were the first to transfer their land to the government, for two main reasons: 1) land values had risen as a result of the announcement of the capital-city project, and 2) they saw this as an opportunity to make more money once the capital city was finished. They speculated that the residential plots and commercial plots in the new capital city would yield huge profits in the future, with the accelerating hike in real estate prices (Vakulabharanam and Prasad 2017:71). Typically, landowners who owned a few acres of “dry” land would sell one acre, use the profits from the sale to buy agricultural land outside the capital region, and transfer the rest of their land to the government under the LPS.

However, marginal landowners who had only small plots of land were uneasy about giving their land to the government. As a result, the government made a provision that landowners could sell their land deeds after transferring the land (Vakulabharanam and Prasad 2017: 71); the conditions under the LPS would then apply to the new owner of the land deeds.15 Vakulabharanam and Prasad (2017: 71) hold that this provision facilitated the process of registration and land sales to buyers who were closely linked to the political class.

No one really knows how much land was sold under the LPS, but a fact-finding report16 has noted the sudden boom in real-estate prices just before the official announcement of the capital-city project, with considerable amounts of land transferred and paid for in cash (Ramachandraiah 2016: 71). There has been no reliable investigation into the land transactions that went on during this time, but it is widely believed that much of this land, especially assigned land, was sold to political leaders under fictitious names.17

The remaining lands that were not immediately pooled or sold were owned either by marginal farmers who were not interested in converting their small plots into means of speculation, or by landowners who had experienced devaluation in land prices as a result of

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17 Interview with Baburao, CPI(M) convener for the capital region, November 16, 2016; interview with Naveen Prakash, division secretary for CITU (Centre of Indian Trade Unions), November 6, 2016; conversation with activists and leaders of NGOs, June 28, 2016.
the announcement of the capital-city project. As noted, most of the opposition came from villages where the land was classified as “wet” land, because the farmers there did not see the value of the LPS. In Penumaka, for example, the vast majority of farmers were marginal, owning less than five acres of agricultural land. For them, the decision to not transfer their land to the government under the LPS was one based on simple calculations. If they cultivated one acre of “wet” land on their own (i.e. not renting it out to a tenant farmer) they would earn on average 100,000 rupees per year, whereas what they were offered from the government under the LPS was 50,000 rupees a year, and only for ten years.

Moreover, since many of the farmers were from the Reddy caste and supported the YSRC party, they did not expect the TDP government to be re-elected enough times to be able to complete the capital city as promised. Therefore, they did not feel certain that the government would keep its promise to landowners and provide them with re-constituted plots once the capital city had been developed.

This group of farmers was difficult to convince. The government employed a wide range of strategies—including spreading of misinformation, direct and indirect threats and intimidating people who opposed the project. Through local politicians and the media, the government started to spread rumors that if landowners did not transfer their land to the government under the LPS, the government would acquire the land with the Land Acquisition Act (2013) (Vakulabharanam and Prasad 2017: 72).

When the LPS was launched on January 1, 2015, the government set a deadline of February 28 for farmers to transfer their land. In some villages, it was announced over loudspeakers how many days there were left until the deadline and that the government would take the land by force after that date. When the first deadline lapsed, the government set a new deadline, and then another one: the government extended the LPS deadlines eight times in all, until August 2015 (Ramachandraiah 2016: 74). Many farmers I spoke with called this “mental torture” directed at pressuring them to hand over their land to the government.

However, as noted above, the Land Acquisition Act (2013) contains elaborate provisions for landowners: the government must get landowner consent, and irrigated multi-crop land (“wet” land) cannot be expropriated. However, very few farmers were familiar with these legal provisions. Their confusion was exacerbated by the fact that the central government under Narendra Modi had promulgated an ordinance to amend the Land Acquisition Act (2013) just one day before the initiation of the LPS, which in effect took

18 Interview with Anumali Gandhi, farmer and activist against the capital city project, November 21, 2016.
away the above-mentioned provisions (Ramachandraiah 2016: 72). This move encountered massive resistance throughout the country, and was not accepted by the Rajya Sabha (the Upper House of the Indian Parliament). Then the BJP government re-promulgated the same ordinance, which again was rejected by the Rajya Sabha. Three times the ordinance was promulgated until it was finally withdrawn by the central government in August 2015 (Ramachandraiah 2016: 74).

Another important strategic measure intended to intimidate farmers and quell resistance was the deployment of police in the capital region just prior to the launch of the LPS. On December 28, 2014—only two days before the official announcement of the capital-city project and the LPS launch—mysterious arson incidents occurred in six riverside villages in the proposed capital region. In these villages, piles of bamboo sticks in banana plantations were set on fire during the night (Ramachandraiah 2016: 72), and in a few cases irrigation systems were also disrupted. Although the damage was not devastating, the government used these incidents as an excuse to deploy 10,000 police personnel, some wearing jungle uniforms with backpacks and guns (ibid.). All of this created an “atmosphere of fear”19 in the region. At the same time, the state government introduced a “Section 144” for this region, annulling the freedom to assemble and the freedom to demonstrate; this provision (so-called “unlawful assembly”) was still in force when I left the field in December 2016.

In the days that followed, the police started arresting people—mainly members of the opposition party, YSRCP, and outspoken opponents of the capital-city project. I spoke with some of these people: very few wanted to talk about their experiences in jail, but one Dalit supporter of the YSRC party told me that he had been picked up by the police and taken to a police station where officers had harassed him verbally and threatened to kill him.20 In the end, no one was charged with arson, but the atmosphere of fear remained. When those whom the police had detained were released, their stories of violence and harassment turned into rumors that frightened the people of the proposed capital region.

The appeal of Amaravati

I view the capital-city project of Andhra Pradesh is an example of a neoliberal mega-city project (see Ramachandraiah 2015; 2016; Upadhya 2017). As such, the project is a part of a wider tendency in India, and elsewhere in Asia, of structuring the economy around cities as

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19 A phrase used by one interlocutor in Penumaka.
20 Interview with Dalit supporter of the YSRCP, November 30, 2016
engines for economic growth (Kennedy and Sood 2016). Roy and Ong (2011) hold that
government efforts to redesign urban environments in many parts of Asia can be seen as
“worlding practices,” speculative processes that involve inter-city comparisons, referencing
and modelling. The Amaravati project, like many other mega-city projects in Asia, is
modelled on the assumed success story of Singapore—indeed, the master plans have been
developed by Singapore-owned consultancy firms.

Throughout the thesis, I will argue that the economic strategy of the Andhra Pradesh
state government has been to acquire land, through dubious means, and speculate on the
future profits of the real-estate market in the region. The government has been doing its
utmost to market the project and keep investor interest high, through various activities like as
performing ceremonies, announcing ambitious plans to the media, and declaring high-profile
land transactions with prominent corporations. The proposed capital region has become what
Shatkin (2011) calls a “landscape of anticipation,” with the government attempting to manage
risks by accounting for the future.

Further, the capital-city project can be seen as a strategy to consolidate the regional
identity of Andhra Pradesh. This perspective brings another element to understanding the
above-mentioned high-profile activities conducted by the state government, which could be
also be associated with strategies of building an “imagined community” (Anderson 1983). Thus,
a twofold strategy emerges: an appeal for investments, while at the same time seeking
to consolidate popular sentiment around the state.

Ong (2011: 11) notes that while governments initiate worlding practices from above
with mega-city projects like Amaravati, there could also be counter-worlding practices from
below. There are important ontological differences between the perspective of the
government, which relates to the landscape through administrative, top–down tasks (Scott
1998), and the “being-in-the-world” phenomenology of those actually living there (Ingold
2011). Counter-worlding practices from below often engender resistance movements which
express their alternative visions in their dissent (Hardt and Negri 2000).

Where, then, are the counter-worlding practices and resistance to the Amaravati project?
For example, why have the landless Dalit communities in region not opposed the project in
any organized and sustained manner (see e.g. Vakulabharanam and Prasad 2017)? Resistance
against land appropriation for the capital-city project has generally been politicized along the
familiar caste lines of Reddys versus Kammas; Dalits have largely remained optimistic. This
seems paradoxical, as Dalits in this region are mostly agricultural workers who stand to lose
their livelihoods as the LPS progresses. Dalits are also the ones who own assigned land, which many have surrendered to the government without receiving any compensation.

Throughout the thesis, I discuss the reasons for the lack of resistance among this labor class, and whether it relates to their affects and aspirations. On the one hand, the same power mechanisms that the state employed to suppress resistance from the Reddy caste and the opposition party, YSRCP, convinced the landless labor class of the determination and strength of the government, and deterred most people from protesting. On the other hand, agricultural workers dream of upward mobility and economic prosperity, so when the state government, through media channels, disseminated alluring computer-generated images of the futuristic capital city of Amaravati, together with projections of millions of jobs, many were persuaded, and eventually accepted the government’s vision of the future.

The result is what Vakulabharanam and Prasad (2017: 75) call a “thesis with weak antithesis”—a worlding project without counter-worlding in the form of a sustained opposition. The lack of resistance paves the way for what James Scott (1998) has termed a “full-fledged disaster” whereby a government is committed to a high-modernist ideology, but neglects local and natural conditions in its administering of the landscape, and civil society fails to resist the project. Scott cites the examples of Chandigarh21 and Brasilia, both designed to express a high-modernist ideology through modern technology and monumental structures architecturally in the landscape. While these capital cities effectively express the ideology, they failed to relate to the human condition—and unplanned social developments occurred on the periphery of both cities (Scott 1998: 119–132).

But whereas Scott focuses on the failure of high-modernist schemes among authoritarian regimes in the 20th century, I discuss a situation in which a democratically elected state government in India in the 21st century is seeking to implement a mega-city project that is environmentally destructive, economically non-viable and socially polarizing. To understand how this project could come about, we must see how the state government was able to frame the discourse around it. In a manufactured atmosphere of fear, the discourse was constructed around imaginaries of “development” and the “good life,” propagated and cultivated by the government and the media, producing hopes and aspirations among the affected people of the region.

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21 The capital of Punjab and Haryana in northern India, designed by Le Corbusier.
2. Methodology

The serendipitous process of finding the right position in the field

I first arrived in Penumaka in an auto rickshaw\(^{22}\) from Vijayawada. I did not know anyone in the village and my understanding of Telugu was rudimentary. The reason for choosing Penumaka as research site was that I had read of substantial opposition to the capital-city project in this village (*The Hindu*: 2016).\(^{23}\) Approximately 65% of the agricultural land in Penumaka had been transferred to the government under the LPS, with about 500 acres remaining in the hands of private landowners.\(^{24}\) I wanted to conduct fieldwork in a village where there was opposition, not because I wanted to study resistance as such, but because I expected to find a wider range of opinions among landowners there than in villages where 90–100% of the agricultural land had been surrendered to the government under the LPS.

The auto rickshaw stopped at a junction in the middle of the village, under a golden statue of NTR, next to a red CPI(M) flag. On the opposite side of the road, six middle-aged men were relaxing outside a tall concrete building. They were dressed in clean white clothes, which indicated that they belonged to the upper strata of society. They greeted me with friendly curiosity and asked me what I was doing there. I introduced myself in Telugu and explained that I had come to study the effects of the capital-city project. To this, they responded that they were opposed to the project and to the LPS, describing it as madness (*pichi*). To my next question, each man told me his caste identity: two were from the Kamma caste, two from the Reddy caste, one from the Kapu caste, and one was Muslim. They all owned land, but no one had more than five acres. One farmer, whose name was Rajendra Reddy, told me that he owned four acres and that he had gone to court against the government concerning the Land Pooling Scheme. He showed me pictures on his smartphone from when he had traveled to New Delhi to demonstrate the amendments to the 2013 Land Acquisition Act.

\(^{22}\) An auto rickshaw is a three-wheeled vehicle for hire, common in India.


\(^{24}\) Interview with Radakrishnaya, Deputy Collector for the CRDA in Penumaka.
Later that day, I was invited to drink with a group of farmers belonging to the Reddy caste in a real-estate office. There were five men, sitting in a circle on a carpet on the floor, drinking expensive alcohol. One of them, Santosh Reddy, told me that he had no faith in the capital-city project, although he had transferred four acres of land to the government under the LPS. He said, in English, “it is not a Land Pooling Scheme, but a Land Pooling Scam,” and added, “It takes one year to develop one acre, and the capital city will be over 50,000 acres.”

I sat talking and drinking with the Reddy farmers until evening, and I slept on the floor in the real-estate office for the first few days. At that time, I did not know that I was in the uru sector of the village, where predominantly upper-caste landowning farmers live. I did not realize until a few days later that the landless agricultural workers, belonging to the lower-caste, were living on the periphery of the village (see Still 2014b: 17–18). It was by chance that I stumbled over the Dalit sector, or palli. Walking along the main road in the village one evening, I was approached by a man coming out of a dark alley. He smelled of alcohol and was toothless. He told me that his name was Raju Babu. Pointing towards the mountains behind the village, he said that he wanted to show me some Buddhist sculptures up there. I was intrigued, and when he asked me if I wanted to eat with him and his family, I accepted the offer with thanks.

He took me through the neighborhood known as Kothuru, past small concrete houses and a large blue Catholic church. I sat down outside his house on a plastic chair and introduced myself to his neighbors, who were sitting outside their houses, brimming with curiosity. They sat wide-eyed and attentive, listening to my stumbling introduction in Telugu, smiling and laughing. Some of them prompted their children to shake hands with me. They told me that they were Christian, so I asked whether they belonged to the Mala caste, but Raju
Babu said proudly that no, they were of the Madiga caste (SC). I asked whether they owned any land and he said that they owned the ground on which their houses stood, but no agricultural land. When I asked how the capital-city project had affected their lives, one woman, who was a teacher, told me that their lives had become difficult after the project had been announced, because prices had risen and there was less agricultural work available.

The day after this first encounter with the residents of Kothuru, I came back and rented a room in a Christian household in the neighborhood and stayed there for five months. This community included various castes, generally belonging to the landless class of agricultural workers. This appeared to be a perfect location for studying the social impacts of the capital-city project on the local level.

Indeed, this process of finding the right position in the field and gaining access among the local community was quite serendipitous. Judith Okely (2012: 23) has noted that “knowledge is, at crucial stages, acquired through accident.” Similarly, I argue, the process of becoming accepted in a community is one that requires openness to unforeseen events. By accepting the unexpected invitation to eat with Raju Babu, who had certainly not appeared particularly attractive, I was introduced to a part of the village and a community that would help me throughout my entire fieldwork stay.

**Language and the hinterland of understanding**

Before coming to Penumaka I had spent five months of intensive language study in Hyderabad. I had realized it would be difficult to be accepted in a rural village and understand the local experience of the capital-city project without a grasp of the native tongue. Speaking the language gave me a deeper understanding of the values, meanings and symbols regularly used by Telugu speakers, but I still needed assistance for translation and interpretation. I could pose questions, but often struggled to understand the answers. However, basic language skills did help in gaining access to informal spheres of village life. Villagers were often surprised and impressed by my dedication and therefore offered me their time.
Assistance with language, and other matters, was provided throughout my fieldwork by a field assistant, whom I will call Prabhu Das. He was an educated middle-aged man who was well liked and respected in the entire village. We worked very closely, virtually every day of the fieldwork, and became very good friends. He became a key informant, as well as an indispensable assistant who helped me understand situations, gain access to the community and navigate in the region. His assistance involved not only translation, but also interpretation and explanation. He knew the villagers of Penumaka very well, so he could contribute insights and aspects about their life stories that they had omitted—and could tell me if someone was not telling the whole truth. For example, once I was talking with a group of women of various ages in the Malawada. They complained loudly about how their lives had become increasingly difficult since the capital-city project had been announced. They said that they did not have work and they did not have money, the rice quota was inadequate, and they did not get scholarships for their children to attend school. One older woman with a cane said that she had no husband, and added that if her family did not have enough money one day then they would eat only half portions for lunch and keep the rest of the food for dinner. I scribbled down their responses in my notebook, but Prabhu Das told me afterwards that “they were lying about half of the time.” He knew the old lady with the cane, and said that she did in fact have a husband: he knew the man, who was alive and well. He also doubted what she had said about only eating half-portions for lunch, because he had overheard someone nearby commenting sarcastically, “if you only eat half portions, how come you are so fat?”

The villagers also accepted me more readily when I came with Prabhu Das, because they knew and trusted him. I think if I had come on my own asking personal questions about their household economy and their relationship to the state, then they would have avoided telling me intimate details and omitted parts which were controversial. Very often villagers thought I was a state official doing a survey for the government, but then Prabhu Das was able to clarify the situation and explain my reason for being there.

**Socio-economic conditions in Kothuru: quantitative study**

Right from the beginning, I got the impression that the capital-city project, ever since its announcement two years earlier, had dramatically changed the social and economic conditions among the landless agricultural workers. I decided to conduct a quantitative study.

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25 I have given pseudonyms to all the villagers that I interacted with on an everyday basis.
26 The neighborhood where members of the Mala caste lived.
27 Rice subsidized by the government for households living under the poverty line.
investigation among villagers in Kothuru, to get an overview of the situation and how the villagers experienced the project. This would also be a good opportunity to get to know the people of Kothuru and introduce myself to the community.

I did not want to use a formal questionnaire, as I wanted the interviews to be dynamic in nature, and felt that using a pre-determined questionnaire might be experienced as authoritarian (Okely 2012: 83). Together with my research assistant, eight flexible questions were formulated in Telugu, as a basis for developing conversations:

1. *Ippudu rajadhani aiendhi kada, meeku pannulu unnayia?* (Now that the capital-city project has started, do you have any work?)
2. *Meeru emmi pannulu cheysaru?* (What kind of work did you do previously?)
3. *Ippudu emmi pannulu cheysthunnaru?* (What kind of work do you do now?)
4. *Mee intlo yentha mandhi panni cheysthunnaru?* (How many people in your household have work?)
5. *Mundhu rajadhani aiendhi sampadayam yentha unnindhi?* (Before the capital-city project, how much did you earn?)
6. *Ippudu sampadayam yentha unnndhi?* (How much do you earn now?)
7. *Meeku rajadhani yella annipisthundhi?* (What do you think about the capital-city project?)
8. *Meeku aanandamiena?* (Are you happy?)

During the first month, Prabhu Das and I interviewed about 60 landless households and individuals, in their homes, at work or at places of leisure. Almost without exception, people greeted us in a friendly way, showing a fair measure of curiosity. Often the conversation was equally much about me, my research and my country as it was about the interviewees.

The varied responses I got from these landless people concerning their economic situation since the launch of the capita-city project often opened the way to free-flowing conversations about the hopes and fears they harbored in relation to the government’s plans. These early conversations inspired me to go deeper into questions concerning the local phenomenology of the capital-city project, as a way of approaching my second research question: how has the project affected the local population depending on their status?
Participant observation: the study of us

During my five months of ethnographic fieldwork, I employed the multi-faceted technique of participant observation so central to social anthropology. I tried to fit in with the villagers whom I studied—in order to lower the cultural barriers between us, but also to acquire “knowledge through the body” (Okely 2012: 77–78) and gain a fuller understanding of their life experiences.

I would often accompany agricultural workers to the field where they worked, harvesting vegetables, weeding, or planting shoots. I took part in these activities in order to acquire the perspectives that they had while working. Our conversations in the fields and the interactions between the workers and the landowning farmers illustrated some of the underlying dynamics of the social drama of everyday life (Goffman 1956). For example, once I witnessed an interaction between female agricultural workers who were harvesting dondakay (ivy gourds) in the field and the farmer whom I was interviewing. While I was talking to the farmer, who was a Kamma and supportive of the capital-city project, the workers complained, from the fields, that he did not give them decent wages. “He is sucking the life out of us with his low wages,” said “Parvathi.” The farmer did not turn towards her, but addressed his response to me, “they [the agricultural workers] get everything for free.” Parvathi and the farmer continued to quarrel, but with humoristic undertones, which suggested that they were actually quite close, although they disputed over money.

There was no way I could escape participating in any given situation, because my presence influenced the social dynamics regardless. For example, once during a conversation about religion involving myself, Prabhu Das and another close friend, I decided to keep quiet and observe rather than get involved in the conversation. But after a short while, Prabhu Das looked at me and asked curiously, “where are you now?” as if I were not paying attention. That was, of course, not the case—but my point is that ethnographic participation is unavoidable in any social interaction (Emerson et al. 1995). One can either participate in the interaction and influence it in that way, or one can be passive and influence the interaction precisely by being passive.

As time progressed and I reflected over the practical implications of participant observation, I began to realize the mutually influencing process of ethnography. Unni Wikan (1992: 463) describes “resonance” between the ethnographer and the people that he/she studies as a process that “demands something of both parties of communication”—a commonality from which humans understand each another. Tim Ingold (2000) speaks of
resonance on the social level, which he explains as a way of constituting the other at the same time as letting oneself become constituted by the other. Similarly, in the process of becoming friends with Prabhu Das, I often pondered over how we influenced each other. In the course of a conversation that might extend over several days, I could often hear my own thoughts being reformulated by him in a different context. Thus, I propose to call ethnography “the study of us,” because ethnographers study the social compositions of which they are a part.

**Participant objectivation**

If it is true that I influenced my friends in the field at the same time as they informed me about the research topics, then that calls for what Bourdieu (2003) termed as “participant objectivation.” “Participant objectivation” entails reflexivity on the part of the ethnographer about the “social world that has made both the anthropologist and the conscious or unconscious anthropology that she (or he) engages in her anthropological practice” (Bourdieu 2003: 283). It is necessary to reflect on one’s background, not least one’s ideological perspective within the discipline of social anthropology.

My identity as a young, Norwegian male with higher education and access to various scales affected how the villagers in Penumaka perceived me and received me. For one thing, I had limited access to the spheres of women on an everyday basis, not because this was forbidden, but because it was considered inappropriate. Men and women gathered in places that were associated with gendered work (see Still 2014a: 96) or in gendered spaces (Spain 1992). Interaction between men and women was not at all unusual, but it was deemed inappropriate for a woman to spend time alone with a man who was not her husband or relative. Similarly, it was inappropriate (and presumably uncomfortable) for women to spend time in male spaces, like places where men drink alcohol. Therefore, I spent most of my time in the company of men, and if I spent time with women it was under the supervision of at least one man. These were generally middle-aged men who had sons and daughters of my age. I stayed with this social group because they accepted me, and I found it interesting to study their position and situation.

It is important to reflect on my ideological perspective, not only because it shaped my theory perspectives and methodological approach in the field, but also because it influenced the interaction between myself and my interlocutors. I was often urged to give my opinions on the subjects like the Land Pooling Scheme versus the Land Acquisition Act. When landowners, for example, asked me for my views on these matters I felt it unethical to hold
back my thoughts from the very people whom I asked personal and sometimes difficult questions about their lives every day. The relationship between me, as an ethnographer, and the villagers whom I studied was reciprocal, so if I wanted openness and transparency from them, I should do the same myself. Therefore, when asked what I thought about the Land Pooling Scheme, I would reply that it was a bad deal for landowners, as well as for landless workers, and that the provisions of the Land Acquisition Act were far better.

**Reflections on the implications of an engaging anthropology**

In a similar vein to the argument that participation is unavoidable during fieldwork, I argue that in ethnographic writing, political participation is unavoidable, and anthropologists should not strive to be neutral Nancy Scheper-Hughes, in her “The Primacy of the Ethical”, calls for an “ethnography that is personally engaged and politically committed” (1995:419). She argues that “anthropologists who are privileged to witness human events close up and over time […] have an ethical obligation to identify the ills in a spirit of solidarity” (418–419). I did indeed have a privileged position as regards analyzing the Amaravati capital-city project, after researching the issue for years and then seeing the social impacts at first hand through five months of fieldwork. It would have been unethical for me to hide behind the concept of “cultural relativism” in writing this thesis as a way of feigning scientific objectivity.

Thomas Hylland Eriksen, in his *Engaging Anthropology* (2006), argues that anthropology has a long history of engaging in political discourse, noting that Malinowski, Boas and Mead all participated in public debates on the topics that they studied. Hylland Eriksen laments the general retreat of anthropologists from the public discussion since World War II, and argues that anthropologists are uniquely positioned to inform political discourse today.28 Similarly, Arjun Appadurai (2013) advocates for an “anthropology of the future,” dedicated to what he calls “the politics of possibility” against “the politics of probability.”

I see the prospects of the Amaravati capital-city project as *speculative*, by which I mean that the people who stand to benefit from it are those who can afford to invest financially and/or politically in its prospected success. Those who stand to lose from the project are the vast majority of the population in the proposed capital region—landless agriculturalists and marginal farmers—because they lack the economic and political capital to be a part of this speculative venture. Instead, they lose their livelihoods as a result of the transformation of the landscape from a fertile agricultural belt into a real-estate business. Moreover, the project is

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28 See also Hylland Eriksen in an interview with Stein (2017).
enormously expensive for the state of Andhra Pradesh; it is destructive of the natural
environment, and is in contravention of several national laws, as well as the Indian
Constitution.

I have considered it a moral obligation not merely to document these facts, but also to
communicate them to a broad audience, within and outside the academic community. For that
reason, three months into my fieldwork in Penumaka, I started a film project together with a
student from Kolkata, to document on camera the social and natural impacts of the capital-city
project. Within the scope of the entire proposed capital region, we focused primarily on four
aspects of the capital-city project: unemployment among the landless agricultural working
class, the use of intimidation and threats during the LPS process, the acquisition of assigned
land, and natural hazards connected with capital-city construction. In addition to interacting
with workers and farmers in several of the 29 villages in the region, we also interviewed a
wide range of politicians, government officials, activists and academics. By arranging
interviews for a film project, we gained access to many top-ranking politicians and officials
within the CRDA, which I probably would not have been able to do on my own. Also, by
studying the capital-city project as a whole, and not just in terms of the local experiences of
the residents of one specific village, we were able to investigate some of the deep and
disturbing aspects of this project.

The ultimate goal of the film project was to present the social and environmental
impacts of the capital-city project in an understandable and accessible way to the public, as
well as to friends who helped me during the fieldwork. The findings presented in this thesis
and in the film are relevant to the residents of the proposed capital region, as well as the
population of Andhra Pradesh in general. A part of the reason why the capital-city project did
not encounter sustained opposition has to do with the biased flow of information in the media
landscape of Andhra Pradesh. Although the capital-city project was reported in regional
newspapers on a daily basis, the coverage often centered around questions of how much it
would cost and the experiences of the secretarial staff of Andhra Pradesh who had to move
from Hyderabad to Velagapudi. I argue that there was an information gap in the media
discourse, as regards the unemployment that ensued after the LPS, and the use of force and
intimidation during this process, as well as other controversial effects of the capital-city
project. There are only four academic articles which document these issues (Ramachandraiah
2015; 2016; Vakulabharanam and Prasad 2017; Upadhya 2017), although these may be
accessible to the public, they are not readily available, so very few (if any) of the people
affected by the project have read them. The film project is an attempt to provide unbiased information to those who have been affected, so that they can act on that information.
3. The Dreamscape of Amaravati

“Sama, dhana, bhedha, dandhopaya”—Telugu proverb, literally: requesting, pleading, warning, forcing. It refers to all the strategies one can use to convince an opponent.

Ethnographic parallel from Penumaka, 1956

In 1956 there was an incident of land acquisition in Penumaka for the construction of a public high school, which serves as a parallel to the dynamics of the ongoing capital-city project.

The ethnographic account is based on the narratives told by two elderly citizens, belonging to the Madiga caste (SC), who lived at the time and remember the incident. I interviewed them separately during my fieldwork in 2016, and it should be mentioned that they had strikingly different opinions on the story. Whereas the woman, Maryamma (80 years old), was fiercely opposed to the dispossession of the farmland, the man, Subha Rao (73 years old), supported the construction project.

The village president (sarpanch) of Penumaka at the time was called Meka Koti Reddy. Subha Rao told me that he had been a liberation fighter and that he was imprisoned for two years during the struggle for independence. Upon his return to Andhra Pradesh he wanted to build a public high school in his native village, Penumaka. At that time, the closest high school around was in Mangaligiri – seven kilometers away – so many people were excited about the project which they thought would bring development to the village.

Meka Koti Reddy decided to build the school in the periphery of the village on an area which was formally classified as “wasteland” (poram boku). However, although it was classified as such, the land was in fact cultivated by close to 200 people, according to Maryamma, who were largely composed of the Madiga caste (SC). They cultivated all sorts of vegetables on that land – beans, spinach, egg plants, etc. – but they did not have any documentation that they owned it.

When the Madigas were summoned by Meka Koti Reddy to discuss the prospects of constructing a high school in that area they did not comply with the village president’s plans. The Madigas said that there was available land, belonging to Reddys, on the side of the road to Yerrabalem. A couple of tamarind trees stood there, which the owners used as shade for
their cattle. “You have your own land, if you need to build a high school” Maryamma narrated to me. Meka Koti Reddy responded by saying that the high school was for public purpose – for Madiga children, as well as Reddy children – and that the land was classified as public. As such, the government had the right to expropriate it.

The construction of the school went ahead, despite protests from the Madiga community. Maryamma, who was fifteen years at the time, remembered how she and her caste-fellows had occupied the construction site in demonstration. She rolled her fictive mustache and slapped her thigh, saying “ra!” (come!) in defiance of the Reddys and the political class.

One night, members of the Madiga community vandalized the construction site. Upon the next morning Meka Koti Reddy went to the police and named some of the protesters, who were imprisoned shortly thereafter. The Madigas reached out to a catholic priest in Dolas Nagar, which is a neighboring village, who helped them to get the protesters released from jail. One evening, as a group of Madigas returned from Dolas Nagar, where they had met with the priest, they were ambushed by a group of Reddys who beat them up “black and blue,” according to Subha Rao. After that, many Madigas fled to the mountain next to the village.

The construction of the school continued and was completed in 1960. Meka Koti Reddy was elected MLA (Member of Legislative Assembly) for the constituency soon thereafter. The Madiga farmers, since they had opposed the government plans, were not compensated. Today the school is used by all castes and communities in the village, and very few people remember that it was once cultivated by Madigas.

There are continuities and differences between this story of dispossession from 1956 and the capital-city project today. Although it was Reddys at that time who dominated the political class, and today it is Kammas, the victims of the development project are the same: Dalits who do not have financial resources or legal support to resist the government’s plans. However, while the construction of the high school was finished despite protests during that time, today the situation is much more complex, because it is more complicated for the state government to expropriate privately owned agricultural land. The reason for that are the achievements of the anti-dispossession movements in India, which have demanded democratic legislation safeguarding the right to life and the right to property of development-affected people.

Here I focus on central issues which underpin the controversy over the capital-city project: the use of coercion and intimidation in connection with the LPS, the socio-economic
impacts on the working class and the assigned landholders, natural hazards, and the legality of the project. Beginning with the historical background, I then introduce the dynamics of the LPS which has been underway since December 2014. I outline the strategies employed by the state government to misinform the local population about its legal powers to acquire land, accompanied by threats and intimidation.

Secondly, I investigate unemployment among the landless labor class since the launch of the LPS. According to government commitments, this class is to be compensated with a meager 2,500 rupees per month and re-skilled by “skill development programs” into a labor force suited for a world-class city—but both these programs have serious weaknesses, leaving this labor class increasingly impoverished. Further, I investigate the issue of assigned lands in the proposed capital region, which has caused great confusion among state officials and the local population.

Thirdly, I examine the legality of the capital-city project and related court cases. Here I argue that the way in which the project has been implemented violates several state and national laws—and, arguably, the Indian Constitution as well.

Fourthly, on the basis of literature on neoliberalism and mega-city projects, I analyze how the capital-city project was conceived by the government of Andhra Pradesh as an engine for economic growth. I argue that the state government was able to “hype the real estate market” by declaring that the landscape would become a world-class city, while at the same time presenting the project as an aspiration towards cosmopolitan values of “development.” Through this strategy, the state government sought to gain legitimacy for the project and strengthen popular sentiments around the regional identity of Andhra Pradesh.

**Historical and ideological background**

**Neoliberal governmentality**

In order to grasp the context of the capital-city project it is necessary to explore the political landscape in which the project was introduced and the ideological agenda of the TDP-led government of Andhra Pradesh in particular. Analysis of official state documents and news articles citing government sources shows that the sitting government is an example of “neoliberal governmentality”—it embraces the economic ideology of free market enterprise, emphasizing privatization of the public sector, deregulation of business and reduction of the power of the workforce to make demands (Harvey 2005). The term also refers to processes of
subjectification among those who are governed by neoliberal principles of market efficiency (Ong 2006; Ortner 2016).

Since its re-election in 2014, the TDP government has propagated a rhetoric of “sustainable double-digit economic growth” as a way of achieving its vision: making Andhra Pradesh a “happy, inclusive, competitive society.”29 In a document called “Vision 2029,” published in 2016, the government articulates a central goal for the future: making Andhra Pradesh the most business-friendly state in India by 2022. By attracting foreign investments and sustaining more than 10% economic growth, the government aspires to achieve, among other things, 100% literacy in the state and poverty eradication by 2020.30 When the TDP was in government in Andhra Pradesh in the 1990s, it published a similar document, “Vision 2020,” in which it envisioned similar achievements. Critics found these aspirations unrealistic, and Bandyopadhyay (2001: 900) called the document “a dream dreamt by a by hard-headed, hi-tech buff and down-to-earth politician,” referring to the sitting Chief Minister, Chandrababu Naidu. In that document, the TDP government aspired, among other things, to achieve 100% literacy by 2010. The fact that in 2015 literacy in Andhra Pradesh was at 67%31 indicates the unrealistic nature of these development projections.

However, the most troubling aspect of the “Vision 2029” document is not its unrealistic projections, but the intended restructuring of the labor force, and reduction of work in the agricultural sector. It is observed that 57% of the population of Andhra Pradesh is employed in agriculture, whereas the sector stands for only 27.6% of the GDSP.32 Therefore, the government seeks to reduce the employment share in the agriculture sector down to 40% and “transform excess agricultural labor-force into productive and skilled manufacturing labor-force who will be active stakeholders in double digit growth path.”33 In similar statements to the press, Chief Minister Chandrababu Naidu has called for an “agricultural revolution” based on Singaporean methods (Deccan Chronicle: 2016).34

This reference to agriculture in Singapore might seem surprising, because farmers constitute only 1% of the population there—but references to Singapore’s technocratic development do carry some ideological weight among governments in Asia. Noting how

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30 Ibid.: 10–12.
34 The Deccan Chronicle, “Farmers told to follow Singaporean methods,” September 27, 2016.
Singapore has become a model for urban mega-projects in many parts of Asia, Huat (2011) highlights many of the modelling strategies employed by the government of Andhra Pradesh concerning the development of the projected capital city. She observes that many governments, including state governments in India, look to Singapore as a successful model, and even engage directly with the government of Singapore for cooperation in developing “sustainable” or “world-class” urban projects. Huat (2011: 48) mentions two Singapore-owned consultancy firms that were part of the consortium which designed the “master plans” for the Amaravati capital-city project: Surbana and Jurong International. She argues that these companies have been transformed from state agencies to international infrastructure planning and engineering consultancies, as a result of their successes in Singapore.

However, Huat (2011: 36) also warns that “cloning” the Singapore model is almost impossible, because of the unique history and political structure of the island-nation. Especially, in comparing Singapore with states like Andhra Pradesh, it should be noted that 1) the population is much smaller (5.75 million versus 49 million), 2) the economy is different (Andhra Pradesh’s economy is largely based on agriculture, whereas agriculture in Singapore is responsible for less than 0.5% of GDP), and 3) the government’s hold on power is different (oppositional parties regularly win democratic elections in Andhra Pradesh, in contrast to Singapore where the People’s Action Party has been in power since 1959). All this makes it unrealistic for Andhra Pradesh to try to model its policies on conditions in Singapore.

Then there is the economic paradox of Andhra Pradesh. Although the state economy is held to be the fastest growing in the country, with 10.99% growth in 2016 (The Times of India: 2016), Andhra Pradesh is nonetheless bogged down in enormous revenue deficits. It also ranks among the worst in the country in suicides among farmers, with thousands committing suicide every year. According to Chindarkar (2007) the main reason is indebtedness and crop failure. Sridhar (2006) links the “agrarian crisis” in India to the liberalization of the Indian economy in 1991, with a roll-back of government subsidies for agricultural technologies, while Indian agricultural commodity prices were also aligned to those prevailing globally. He argues that the government of Andhra Pradesh took the lead in pushing this agenda of liberalization, under the auspices of the World Bank, and significantly

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reduced its role as a public investor and intervener in the agricultural sector (Sridhar 2006: 1561–1562).

Banks were discouraged from lending to marginal farmers and tenant farmers, so they had to look for credit from private moneylenders (Sridhar 2006: 1564; Chindarkar 2007: 7). According to a study conducted in 2013 by the National Sample Survey Office (NSSO), 92.9% of agricultural households in Andhra Pradesh are in debt—the highest rate in the country (the national average is 52%). In this precarious situation, if crops should fail, farmers will not be able to pay back their debts and invest in the next crop. That is when farmers, in desperation, resort to taking their own lives.

**Land politics in modern India**

In neoliberal India, state governments have retracted from their role as a provider and regulator, becoming facilitators of corporate interests (see Patnaik 2007; Nielsen 2010; Levien 2011; Ramachandraiah and Srinavasan 2011; Cross 2014, Sud 2014; Bedi and Tillin 2015). Levien (2012) argues that state governments in India have become “land broker states,” acquiring land for private corporations under the right of *eminent domain*. Under the terms of the colonial Land Acquisition Act from 1894, it was possible to stretch the definition of “public purpose” to include for-profit infrastructural projects developed by private companies (Levien 2011: 66–67; 2012: 944–945; see also Ramachandraiah and Venkateswarlu 2014). State governments frequently acquired land for industrial projects in other periods as well, but since the liberalization of the economy in the 1990s, the acquisition of land for the private sector has increased, bringing a qualitative shift in the dynamics in the politics of land in India (Levien 2012: 944; Ramachandraiah and Venkateswarlu 2014: 47).

According to Levien (2012: 942), the demand for non-agricultural land skyrocketed after liberalization, and especially after 2005 when the national economy surpassed 8% growth rates and the real-estate sector experienced a boom. As a result of the hike in land prices, there was a similar a boom in the construction of Special Economic Zones (SEZs) during the 2000s (Cross 2014; Bedi and Tillin 2015). SEZs are liberalized economic enclaves, with minimal taxes and regulations (Levien 2012: 934), intended to attract international business and export products and services (Ramachandraiah and Venkateswarlu 2014: 2). Indian state governments compete with each other in being “most business-friendly,” in a race

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to the bottom in terms of deregulation and tax breaks (Bedi and Tillin 2015). Between 1960 and 1990 there were seven SEZs in India; by the end of the first decade of the 2000s there were 5000. In 2005, the SEZ Act was passed, and in the course of the next three years, 462 new SEZs received formal approval from the government (Cross 2014: 16).

Andhra Pradesh embraced the neoliberal reforms from 1995 onwards, and has the second highest number of SEZs of any state in India (Ramachandraiah and Venkateswarlu 2014: 5), with 20% of all the SEZs in the country (Cross 2014: 18). Cross (2014) argues that these zones are “dreamworlds,” through which the governments and local populations fantasize about a new and technologically modernized India. Especially educated young males invest their hopes and aspirations in the dream of getting employment in these zones (Cross 2009). However, most of these SEZs, Cross (2014: 52) points out, are in fact not operational. In Andhra Pradesh only 38 out of 115 economic zones were functioning in 2013: the other SEZs are the remnants of a faded dream.

Many scholars (e.g. Ramachandraiah and Srinavasan 2011; Ramachandraiah and Venkateswarlu 2014; Prasad et al. 2012: Prasad: 2015) have drawn parallels between the Indian state government’s practice of acquiring land for private interests and David Harvey’s (2005) concept of “accumulation by dispossession.” Harvey (2005: 159) explains “accumulation by dispossession” as a “continuation and proliferation of accumulation practices which Marx had treated as ‘primitive’ or ‘original’ during the rise of capitalism.” The argument is that in the pursuit of economic growth, governments view land as a resource that they can acquire and sell on a speculative market to corporations or development agencies. In the case of Andhra Pradesh, the government has stated that it is committed to acquiring 100,000 acres of land in each of the 13 districts in the state, to be placed in a “land bank,” known as Andhra Pradesh Industrial Infrastructure Corporation (APIIC). This land is amassed by the government for the official purpose of developing infrastructure or industry in the state, but the procedure does not necessarily involve any specific offers from development corporations regarding the land in question.

There has been considerable debate about the relevance of the “accumulation by dispossession” concept in relation to land politics in India. Anthropologists like Cross (2014), Levien (2012) and Majumder (2012) have argued that the model imposes a top–down “penetrative capitalism” narrative—whereas, they hold, in many instances it is just as much

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38 The APIIC was formed in September 1993 with the objective of providing infrastructure in identified areas for industrial development (Ramachandraiah and Venkateswarlu 2014: 7). See the APIIC Land Bank website: http://easy2browse.com/APIIC_N/, accessed November 3, 2017.
the everyday dreams and hopes of the local population that shape the dynamics of land acquisition; responses to each specific development project may differ greatly.

Nonetheless, there has been local resistance to state-sponsored dispossession-through-development all around the country. Levien (2013: 366) calls these anti-dispossession struggles India’s “land wars,” and argues that they have been largely ad hoc, single-issue organizations resisting specific land-acquisition projects. They found limited support from political parties, but were gradually and painstakingly formed into national-level alliances under the platform of the National Alliance of People’s Movements (NAPM) (Levien 2013: 367). The NAPM is a national umbrella organization of allied resistance movements protesting cases of land acquisition and dispossession all over the country and pushing for comprehensive legislation to protect the right to property and right to life of landowners and stakeholders affected by development projects.

Two specific instances of state-led land acquisition brought the struggle for legal protection for local populations to a new level. Both cases were in West Bengal and were initiated by the Marxist state government, the Left Front. The first case concerned the 2006 decision by the state government to acquire almost 1,000 acres of agricultural land for a Tata Motors car factory in Singur; the second one involved the expropriation 10,000 acres for a petrochemical SEZ promoted by a Indonesian company in Nandigram. In both cases there was sustained resistance on the ground by those affected by the projects. In Nandigram, 14 villagers were killed and 70 wounded in a clash with police forces in March 2007 (Levien 2012: 933; 2013: 353).

These two instances of resistance against industry projects in West Bengal, and many others, led to nationwide protests, and anti-dispossession became a central issue in subsequent state and national elections. The Marxist government in West Bengal was toppled in the 2008 state elections, after more than three decades in power, and the public outcry forced the central governments to limit land acquisitions for SEZs (Levien 2013: 353). Moreover, the land controversies in West Bengal led to a discursive shift in the politics of India, in which it became possible to put pressure on the government to ensure national legislation with provisions to local populations.

Thus, in 2013, after decades of sustained struggle from anti-dispossession movements in India, the central government, under the Congress-led United Progressive Alliance (UPA), passed the Right to Fair Compensation and Transparency in Land Acquisition, Rehabilitation
and Resettlement Bill, 2013 (RFCTLARR, better known as the 2013 Land Acquisition Act. It was intended to provide a middle ground between the interests of civil society resistance groups and the interests of the corporate sector: and both industrialists and social activists were disappointed. Landowners would be paid more than usual (up to four times the market price for rural land), but social activists argued that the Act made it easier to transfer land under the “public purpose” clause (Nielsen and Nilsen 2014: 211–212). However, it included an important “consent clause,” which required 70% consent for public–private partnership (PPP) projects and 80% consent for projects for private companies, from the “affected families” (Chapter I: 2). The term “affected families” refers to all who are affected by the project, not just the landowners, but also those whose livelihood are involved (Chapter I: 3). In addition, there a “social impact assessment” should be conducted to determine the social consequences of the land acquisition (Chapter II). Also included was a special provision for food security, according to which “no irrigated multi-cropped land shall be acquired under this Act” (Chapter III: 1), except under exceptional circumstances.

The new Land Acquisition Act created legal hurdles for state governments throughout India, which were now in a squeeze between the demand for land by the corporate sector and the provisions of the law. Thus, when the BJP-led National Democratic Alliance (NDA) coalition came into power in 2014 and Narendra Modi became the new Prime Minister of India, the central government promulgated an ordinance to amend the Land Acquisition Act (2013). The amendment introduced exceptions to the “consent clause,” the obligation to conduct “social impact assessment” and the “food security clause” for projects concerning “national security,” “rural infrastructure,” “affordable housing,” “industrial corridors” or “social infrastructure.” However, these are vague definitions, which could result in the misuse of the 2013 Land Acquisition Act by state governments as before.

The ordinance was met with massive resistance, from opposition parties as well as local anti-dispossession movements. There were huge protests in New Delhi after the promulgation of the ordinance; during one demonstration a farmer hung himself from a nearby tree, which again sparked national outcry (Aljazeera 2015). The amendment was rejected in the Rajya Sabha due to resistance from the opposition parties. But then the Cabinet in the Lok Sabha

(the Lower House) re-promulgated the amendment in 2015 (Ramachandraiah 2016: 71). Three times the amendment was promulgated by the BJP Cabinet, and each time it was rejected by the Rajya Sabha (ibid.: 74)—but the amendment remained in effect each time until the parliament reconvened. Finally, as a result of sustained resistance and political pressure, and because of the upcoming state elections in Bihar, the central government withdrew the amendment in August 2015.

A regime of co-option

According to Ramachandraiah (2016), the Andhra Pradesh government initiated a “regime of co-option” in order to convince landowners to part with their land, as well as to quell resistance against the project by enticing stakeholders into participating in the process of imagining the capital city.

First, by proposing to make the landowners “partners” in the development of the capital-city construction the government was able, to a certain degree, to engage them in negotiating the terms and conditions of the Land Pooling Scheme (LPS). Before the official announcement, the conditions for the LPS (like the size of the reconstituted plots and the annual compensation amount) were floated around, to gauge support. Politicians, as well as real-estate developers loyal to the government, circulated speculative projections about how land values would rise with the development of the capital city, and told landowners that the reconstituted plots they would receive in return for their agricultural plots would be worth far more than their original lands (Vakulabharanam and Prasad 2017: 71).

Initially there did not seem to be much support for the LPS in the villages of the proposed capital region. The prosperous farmer-capitalists (Upadhya 1988) in the drylands of Thullur mandal who were loyal to TDP showed interest, but there was substantial opposition from landowners in the riverbank villages. The panchayat (village council) of Nidamarru passed a resolution opposing any acquisition or pooling of agricultural lands in the village for construction of the capital city (Ramachandraiah 2016: 72). The village panchayats in Rayapudi and Penumaka moved to pass similar resolutions, but the panchayat secretaries were instructed not to give official status to such resolutions (ibid.).

Even in Lingayapalem, where the Kamma caste and the TDP are dominant, there was originally opposition to the LPS. One resident told me that the village president (TDP) had called a gram sabha (village meeting). When asked if they were willing to give their land under the LPS for the construction of the capital city, most of the local landowners said they
were opposed, adding that their land was like their mother (kannathali bhumi okkatey). At this, the village president allegedly told them angrily “Those who don’t want to give their land can go!”

Faced with such opposition, the government modified the LPS, hoping to persuade landowners to part with their land. For one thing, the government made it possible to sell the land deed even after the land had been pooled. This swayed many marginal farmers who owned “dry” land (Vakulabharanam and Prasad 2017: 71). Also, the government increased the size of commercial plots for landowners of “wet” land from 200 square yards to 300 square yards.

However, the most significant aspect in the strategy of co-optation by the state government under the LPS was marketing the dream of living in a “world-class” capital city. Three master plans, developed by Singapore-owned consultancy firms, were issued by the government in the course of 2015. These plans projected elaborate images of futuristic infrastructure, skyscrapers, a riverfront, expansive areas of greenery, and modern transportation systems (Ramachandraiah 2015; Upadhya 2017: 178). Seductive computer-generated images were widely propagated by electronic and print media, together with the government’s projections of bringing 5.6 million jobs and

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42 Conversation with resident of Lingayapalem November 25, 2016.
43 Interview with Ramachandraiah, November 26, 2016.
13.5 million people to the city by 2050.

While critics argued that these projections were unrealistic (Ramachandraiah 2015; 2016; Vakulabharanam and Prasad 2017: 70), the government continued to cultivate imaginings of the capital-city project. For example, it was envisioned to be divided into nine “cities”: Government City, Justice City, Health City, Tourism City, Finance City, Media City, Electronics City, Knowledge City, and Sports City (Avenue Realty: 2015).44 The Chief Minister even indicated that Amaravati might host the Olympic Games in the future (The Hans India: 2016).45

Although such visions might seem excessive, I argue that the government managed to convince large sections of the population. One reason why these projections were compelling has to do with what Michael Hardt (2007: xii) calls the “production of affect,” which operates through coding, information, ideas, and images. Nigel Thrift (2007: 248) notes how political campaigns are often mediated through “low-information signaling,” by which he means “affective short-cuts that convey just enough of the character of candidates to voters and which are open to all kinds of manipulation, particularly via the use of non-verbal cues like music and imagery.” Similarly, I argue that government projections, constantly communicated to the people of Andhra Pradesh through television, newspapers, and the like, produced affective aspirations for a modernist model of the future, with jobs and with the pride of belonging to a global city.

It was particularly the “illusion of development” (Hardt and Negri 2000: 282) that convinced local people, whether landowners or landless. An old landless Dalit man in Penumaka endorsed the project with these words: “my country must get rich! For my grandchildren. I may not be there, but my grandchildren shall enjoy the wealth that awaits them. (…) We have to look to development.” This imperative of “development”—which was thought to entail modern infrastructure and employment opportunities—was reiterated by all those who supported the capital-city project. Still, it seems particularly paradoxical that landless Dalits should promote this concept, as they have not benefitted from such “development”—not yet, at least.

Impact of the Land Acquisition Act ordinance

Initiated on January 1, 2015, the LPS was intended to last until February 28. During that period, the government reiterated the message that landowners could part with their land voluntarily under the scheme—or else the government would take it by force, through land acquisition. This message was broadcasted by media outlets, heard over loudspeakers in villages throughout the region, and relentlessly propagated by local and state-level politicians loyal to the government. Two ministers in the Telugu Desam Party—P. Narayana, Minister for Municipal Administration and Urban Development, and Prathipati Pulla Rao, Minister for Agriculture—travelled around to convince reluctant landowners of the benefits of the LPS … as well as the consequences if they refused to comply (Ramachandraiah 2016: 73).

However, as outlined above, at that time the legal powers of state governments to acquire land were being negotiated at the central level in New Delhi. The new Land Acquisition Act (2013) included provisions whereby local populations could reject land acquisitions, and made it almost impossible for state governments to acquire multi-cropped land. But on December 31, 2014—one day before the LPS was enacted—the central government promulgated an ordinance to amend the Land Acquisition Act of 2013. Although voted down in the Rajya Sabha, it was re-promulgated by the central government twice more, and was thus in effect, on and off, until August 31, when the central government finally withdrew the promulgation. The ongoing negotiations over the Land Acquisition Act of 2013 in New Delhi caused great confusion and doubt in the minds of many landowners in Andhra Pradesh concerning the capital-city project and the LPS.

On the 30th of October 2016, I spoke with Ram Babu Mallavarapu, a researcher at the Centre for Economic and Social Studies in Hyderabad. He was originally from Penumaka. His family lived in the village, and owned two acres of agricultural land, which they had surrendered to the government under the LPS. Mallavarapu had conducted research and had published articles on displacement of indigenous people in Andhra Pradesh (see Mallavarapu 2006), and had been fighting for their property rights long before the capital-city project was announced. While familiar with the new Land Acquisition Act of 2013, he was also aware that the central government had promulgated an ordinance to amend it. He lamented the situation after his family had surrendered their land: “We have lost everything. It is like we are dead.” However, he defended the decision to transfer the land to the government under the LPS, because the government could have legally acquired the land in the period from December 31, 2014 to August 31, 2015. If the government had acquired their land through the
Land Acquisition Act of 2013, Mallavarapu’s family would have received a compensation package, supposed to be up to four times the market value. But because land values are normally registered as much lower, in order to avoid stamp duty taxes, they would have received a relatively small compensation (see Ramachandraiah and Venkateswarlu 2014: 36).

These were the considerations of Mallavarapu and his family, who can be said to be fairly well-informed about the legal dynamics of land acquisition. Most farmers were able to understand the implications of the LPS and evaluate the credibility of the claims made by the state government about its legal powers to acquire privately owned agricultural land under the Land Acquisition Act of 2013. Then the LPS was launched, and they had to decide whether or not to participate. Rules for the LPS were not published in the regional language, Telugu, and the landowners were given a short timeframe to get informed and make their decisions (Ramachandaiah 2016: 72). Many farmers I spoke with referred to this period as “mental torture,” which they saw as a deliberate tactic of the state government to put pressure on them.

Many landowners probably thought that their “mental torture” would be over by February 28, 2015—but after the first deadline for the LPS had passed, another one was set, and then another, and then another. All told, the government of Andhra Pradesh extended the deadline eight times until August 31. Ramachandraiah (2016: 74) argues that the ordinance by the central government “was brought in as a ‘conspiracy’ to enable the AP government to intimidate the farmers,” because the promulgation and re-promulgations of the ordinance coincided with the critical eight first months of the LPS in Andhra Pradesh.

An atmosphere of fear

In addition to the Land Acquisition Act ordinance, there were also large concentrations of security forces present in the proposed capital region, putting further pressure on farmers to part with their land (Ramachandraiah 2016: 72). Ram Babu Mallavarapu (see above) mentioned the “atmosphere of fear” (bayanaka vathavaranam) after new police outposts had been stationed in each village.

The background to this police presence is important: As explained earlier, on December 28, 2014—two days before the enactment of the CRDA Act—banana plantations in six riverbank villages were burnt. Although no information has been released from the police investigation, it seems that the perpetrators in Lingayapalem started during the night and set fire to heaps of bamboo sticks, which were used by farmers to stabilize their banana plants. It is likely that the culprits moved southward, because similar incidents took place in
Uddandrayinipalem, Malkapuram, Venkatapalem, Penumaka, and Undavalli that same night. Local residents apparently glimpsed the perpetrators, but they escaped in the darkness of the verdant plantations.  

The next day, on December 29, eight battalions of police (approximately 10,000 police personnel) were stationed in the villages of the region, and a Section 144 (prohibiting the freedom of assembly and the freedom to demonstrate) was passed for the entire region (Ramachandraiah 2016: 72). For a period, special police forces with green military uniforms, backpacks and guns would march in the streets at night (ibid.). One farmer from Thullur described his experience to me:

> After the burning incidents, armed forces came to our villages. We had never seen that kind of police in *khaki chokka* (military shirts) in our villages. Occasionally, we would see police in Thullur *mandal*, but after the burning incidents we saw so many police, all on foot, carrying guns. It created fear among the people. All the farmers were afraid.

On December 29, the police started to arrest youth and those who had opposed the LPS, on suspicion of arson. Srinadh Chowdery, a young man who previously had been a TDP supporter, but who had voiced opposition against the capital-city project, was arrested and questioned by the police that day. He was moved to several police stations and interrogated by various police inspectors, who pressured him to confess to having set fire to the banana plantations on December 28. He was also asked repeatedly whether he and his family had given their land (three acres) to the government under the LPS, which they had not. He was finally released after having spent seven days in custody, but he is still facing a charge sheet with four sections. In the end, his family surrendered their agricultural land to the government under the LPS. Although the police had promised to drop the charges on Srinadh if the family surrendered their land, the police did not keep their word. Srinadh told me that even though he had been a supporter of the TDP before this incident, he would now like to see the downfall of the party, because of all the mental torture they had caused him and his family.

According to Ramachandraiah (2016: 72), those belonging to the main opposition party (YSRCP) or who were from the Dalit community were treated roughly. One Dalit supporter of YSRCP told me that he had been arrested on December 29. During the time he spent in custody, he was interrogated and verbally abused by the police. He said that people from the

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46 These conclusions are based on an interaction with residents of Lingayapalem and conversations with Ramachandraiah on November 26, 2016.

47 Interview with farmer, November 6, 2016.
Intelligence Bureau had put a gun to his head and threatened to shoot him if he did not confess to setting fire to the banana plantations. Another time, they took him to a derelict roof-top and threatened to throw him over the edge if he did not confess.

In the wake of the burning incident and the police presence, the atmosphere of fear was fueled by anxious rumors about those who had been arrested. For example, I once heard a story among the Malawada area of Penumaka from a man who refused to talk to me about the capital-city project, for fear of reprisals by the government. He said, “They will come and arrest me. His [Chandrababu Naidu’s] foot is like that. If you talk good about the government, it is ok, but if you are against the government, then it is a problem.” He explained that Sudharani Boyapati, a Kamma from Krishnayapalem, had expressed disagreement with the LPS in the media and had been impolite when she referred to the politicians. The man in Malawada believed that she had disappeared for a few days, and when she came back she did not want to talk to the press again. Neither did he, he said, because he was afraid something would happen to him too.

After hearing this story, I interviewed Sudharani Boyapati and asked her about her experiences concerning the project and the LPS. She explained that she and her family were small-scale farmers, owning less than two acres, but their land was fertile and multi-cropped. She had criticized the capital-city project to a Telugu news channel, and in doing so she referred to a few TDP politicians in the informal (and thereby less polite) third-person vadu form, instead of formal/ honorific third-person varu form. Her statements went viral on social media, and soon after she and members of her family were summoned before the Joint Collector of the CRDA, Cheruku Sreedhar (now the Commissioner for the CRDA). Sreedhar talked to them about the merits of the LPS, but they were not convinced. Later the police came to Boyapati’s house and started to enquire about her family’s political affiliation. Officers from the Intelligence Bureau also came and asked about her profession and her children’s whereabouts. This frightened Boyapati and her family, and when the Joint Collector came to her house again, she and her brother agreed to give their land to the government under the LPS. She said that the day that her husband sent the consent form (9.3) to the CRDA was the saddest day of her life (Ramachandraiah 2016: 73).

However, it is clear that this account of being intimidated by government agencies, however cruel and extrajudicial, did not correspond with the story told by the man I met in the

Malawada of Penumaka. But the rumors carried by this story (perhaps mixed with rumors of other stories) exacerbated local fears of government reprisals.

As I see it, the arson incidents of December 28, 2014 in the six riverbank villages served as a shock, creating fear and confusion among the local population, which the state government used as a pretext to introduce anti-democratic measures in order to suppress opposition to the LPS (see Klein 2007). Government intimidation of farmers, singling out pockets of resistance and collecting land under the LPS, continued throughout 2015 and 2016.

Indicative of the government’s use of force and intimidation in connection with the LPS is an incident that occurred on October 22, 2015. On that day, the government of Andhra Pradesh had invited national and international representatives to attend a cornerstone-laying ceremony (*bhumi pooja*) for the construction of the start-up area, known as the Seed Capital. Comprehensive security measures were put in place because the Indian Prime Minister, the Japanese Prime Minister and the Singaporean Prime Minister, and many other high-ranking politicians would be present Nonetheless, on that day, a 4.7 acre sugar cane plantation in Malkapuram village nearby was burnt to the ground, without anyone noticing it.

In the days that followed, the owner of the farm, Chandraseekhar Rao, who had opposed the LPS, was questioned by the police several times. They interrogated him, not about the burning of his crops, but about his noncompliance with the LPS: “Why do you take unnecessary risks? Just give your land for LPS, or otherwise the case will continue.” Chandraseekhar Rao would not budge, and replied that it was not the duty of the police to convince people to give their land for the Land Pooling Scheme. Soon after, the lease-holder was questioned by the police. He was beaten and physically tortured in jail for days until he confessed to a false statement that he had been ordered by the landowner to set fire to the plantation. After that, he was released, thoroughly frightened.49

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49 Interview with Chandraseekhar Rao, the leaseholder; and their lawyer, Mallela Seshagiri Rao, December 5, 2016. See also Ramachandraiah (2016: 73).
Today, the government claims that it has obtained nearly 95% of the land required for construction of the capital city from the landowners who have shown their interest by sending in consent forms to the CRDA. The CRDA claims that the land was procured smoothly through the voluntary Land Pooling Scheme, with hardly any resistance from farmers (The Hindu: 2015). Also media channels elsewhere in India have praised the LPS as voluntary and democratic, in comparison to land acquisition, which involves forceful takeover (see e.g. Times of India: 2015). However, the accounts presented above indicate that the LPS procedure was not at all “voluntary.” In fact, the government presented landowners with the choice between voluntarily transferring their land to the government under the Land Pooling Scheme, and the government forcibly acquiring the land under the terms of the 2013 Land Acquisition Act. The LPS, as it was implemented in Andhra Pradesh for the construction of the capital city, stands out as a sustained effort on the part of the government to pressure landowners to surrender their land.

During an interview with Babu Rao, the CPI(M) convener for the capital region, he cited a Telugu saying: “sama, dhana, bhedha, dandhopaya.” Literally it means “requesting, pleading, warning, forcing,” and refers to the many means by which someone can convince an opponent. In the context of the capital-city project, it indicates the combined strategies employed by the state government—co-optation, coercion, threats, and intimidation—to get landowners to part with their land, ostensibly of their own free will.

Socio-ecological consequences of the capital-city project

What have been the socio-ecological consequences of the capital-city project, as regards agriculture and labor in the 29 villages of the proposed capital region? Using ethnographic

examples, I will show how the neoliberal tendency to grab land for corporate profits and the resultant marginalization of weaker sections of society has been exacerbated by the project.

Grabbing assigned land: a social justice project in reverse gear

The government of Andhra Pradesh had assigned land for cultivation to landless, poor families since 1954, but it gradually emerged that many of the assigned landholders were no longer in possession of the land that had been provided. The state government reacted by passing the Andhra Pradesh Assigned Land (Prohibition of Transfer) Act, 1977, which included strict legal provisions against transferring such land to someone who is not landless and poor (Ramachandraiah and Venkateswarlu 2014: 27–28). According to this law, assigned land is to be used solely for cultivation purposes, and the deed may be transferred only between landless poor people. Today, assigned lands are owned by populations belonging to the SC, ST and BC categories, widely known collectively as Dalits (Ramachandraiah and Srinavasan 2011: 62).

There are 2,271 acres of assigned lands in the proposed capital region of Andhra Pradesh, spread out in each of the populated villages. Some of the assigned lands are referred to as lanka lands and are located in the flood-prone area between the Krishna River and the river bund (the karakata), or on islands in the river. The soil in these areas is very fertile, due to flooding during the rainy season.

In the aftermath of the liberalization of the Indian economy in the 1990s and the rise of “post-productive capitalism” (Vakulabharanam and Prasad 2017: 71), the state government of Andhra Pradesh has acquired much of the land that previous governments had assigned to landless poor people: a tendency that Ramachandraiah and Srinavasan call a “social justice project in reverse gear” (2011: 62) Drawing on ethnographic examples from the capital-city project in Andhra Pradesh, I explain how the government has acquired assigned lands from Dalits.

Uddandarayunipalem

Although legal rights to the assigned land are spelled out clearly in the Prohibition of Transfer Act (1977), politicians loyal to the government of Andhra Pradesh tried to propagate misinformation about land deeds in the proposed capital region in order to procure assigned land (Ramachandraiah 2016: 73). The confusion among assigned landholders has played out

53 A wall on the right bank of the Krishna River, built in 1957 to protect the villages from floods.
variously in different villages. For example, in Uddandarayunipalem, where members of the Madiga caste cultivate an area of about 280 acres, people did not seem to understand that they actually owned the land that had been assigned to their households decades ago. When I was there in November 2016, I asked a Madiga assigned landholder whether he had given his land to the government under the LPS. He responded by saying “no, they have not taken it.” Although he had documentation to prove that he owned the land, he nonetheless seemed to think that the government was the rightful owner, because at the Registrar’s Office the land was not marked with his name, but with the label: “government land.” I asked him who had told him that the land belonged to the government, and he said immediately, “Chandra babu Naidu.” He added that the local MLA (Member of Legislative Assembly) and MRO (Mandal Revenue Official) also had said that the land belonged to the government. They had said that assigned landholders had a choice: either to give the land to the government under the LPS and receive the compensation package guaranteed under this scheme, or the government would simply acquire it from them without giving compensation.

The legal status of the lanka lands in Uddandarayunipalem was ambiguous under the LPS, because the state government had declared that the land would be used for construction of the capital city. However, the government could not determine who the rightful owners of the assigned lands were, and thus who were eligible for the LPS compensation package. In most cases, the land had been assigned to landless poor families many decades ago and had been passed down through one or two generations, in the process getting split up into smaller plots. Under the LPS, the government had guaranteed payment of an annual compensation of 50,000 rupees for each acre or less of “wet” land—which the lanka lands in Uddandarayunipalem are. In other words, the government had committed to giving 50,000 rupees to a number of assigned landholders who had inherited small plots of land (a tenth of an acre, for example). Many local people saw this as an opportunity to claim that they owned assigned land even though they did not, so that they could enjoy the compensation package. Therefore, the CRDA initiated a “social enumeration survey” to identify the rightful assignees in the region. But this proved to be a daunting task, to say the least, and work on the survey has been ongoing for the last two years. In Uddandarayunipalem, under the “social enumeration survey,” the assigned landholders were allowed to cultivate the soil, but without receiving compensation under the LPS.
In other parts of the region, however, assignees were not allowed to cultivate the land which the government had earmarked for the construction of the new capital city. The assigned lands on Chinnalanka, an island in the Krishna River, were lying fallow when I visited in November 2016. I had come with representatives from the Borupalem Harijana Society, an organization of Madiga farmers who had been assigned lands on the island. They dealt with practical issues such as electricity, water, transport etc. for the cultivation of these plots. We stood under the shade of a tree, looking over the land which had been assigned to members of their organization, when the president of Borupalem Harijana Society told me that the government had taken the land two years ago when the LPS was announced. The assignees had been pleased, he said, because they hoped that they would get the annual compensation package of 50,000 rupees, as well as new plots in the capital city, as per LPS rules. However, they had not received compensation or plots, because the government was still conducting a survey to identify who were eligible for compensation packages. Twice in the course of the last two years the government had presented results from the survey, but people had come forward with objections regarding mistakes in identifying names and the extent of their lands.

While we were talking about the assigned lands, a group of 24 farmers claiming to represent another assigned land society for the OBC community in Rayapudi, called Rayapudi Rajika Society, arrived, together with five officials from the CRDA and the VRO (Village Revenue Officer) from Thullur. The members of the Rayapudi Rajika Society had come to deliver a complaint about the CRDA’s findings in the land survey. They claimed that they owned 34 acres altogether, but according to the results of the CRDA’s survey they owned only between 4 and 5 acres on the island. They came forward to where we were standing and proclaimed that they owned the land which the members of the Borupalem Harijana Society had just told me that they owned. The president of the Borupalem Harijana Society disagreed, and said that he had been cultivating that land for 50 years. He turned to the representative from Rayapudi
Rajika Society and said, “You are wrong (thappu chupistunnaru). The government will beat you, or we will beat you.”

The situation was characterized by confusion and frustration, on the part of the farmers as well as the state officials, and did not seem to lead anywhere. To me, the people who claimed to be from Rayapudi Rajika Society did not appear genuine: they did not show any documentation for the land that they declared as their own, and they did not even know who was cultivating the land next to their proclaimed properties. I suspect they were opportunistic fraudsters who sought to take advantage of the confusion in order to obtain the LPS compensation package.

_Penumaka_

In Penumaka, two large tracts of lands on the periphery of the village were divided into smaller plots and assigned to the Lambadi community (ST) many decades ago. They had been cultivating onion shoots (_ulinatlu_) on these plots until about 15 years ago, when farmers began buying onion shoots from neighboring Prakasam district and not locally. When the capital-city project was announced in December 2014, many assigned landholders sent in consent forms to the CRDA to announce their interest in participating in the scheme. But very few have received any compensation, because of the ongoing “social enumeration survey.” In addition, assignees in Penumaka who sent consent forms to the CRDA cannot receive the agricultural workers’ pension of 2,500 rupees per month either, because they are registered with land deeds. They are trapped in a legal limbo, punished for owning assigned lands.

One example from a household which owned both assigned lands and normally registered _patta_ land can illustrate my argument. Many decades ago, the state government assigned one acre of agricultural land to a household with nine children. When the original deed-holder died, the land was divided into nine parts and shared by each sibling. When the LPS was announced, all but two of them agreed to send in a consent form to the CRDA in order to participate in the government scheme. Since two of the siblings refused to sign the
form, they did not get the compensation. One of the nine, whom I shall call Yellama, also owned 0.30 acres of normally registered land (*patta* land). Yellama had surrendered her *patta* land under the LPS, but she did not receive compensation for that land either. When the CRDA found out that she owned assigned land, as well as the *patta* land, they offered to pay her 14,500 rupees per year (which is the proportional amount of money according to the size of her plot, but it is not the policy under the LPS rules). She said that she had not received any clarification from the CRDA as to why she would get less compensation than other people who participated in the LPS; and when she asked if she could withdraw the land from the agreement she was told to wait until the situation had calmed down. At the end of our interview she said: “We have nothing. We are dependent on agricultural work.”

I asked the Deputy Collector for the CRDA in Penumaka about allegations made by social activists that assigned land was being pooled by the government without paying the compensation stipulated in the LPS.\(^{54}\) He told me that the reason why the CRDA had not paid compensation to the assignees according to the LPS was that assigned land had been sold to affluent, upper-caste people, in violation of the Prohibition of Transfer Act (1977). He assured me, however, that according to the same Act, assigned landholders *are* eligible for compensation and the government is required to pay them.\(^{55}\) In February 2016, the state government passed a government order (GO no. 41), according to which assigned landholders will be compensated on par with *patta* landowners.\(^{56}\) However, this order has still not been implemented.\(^{57}\)

Vakulabharanam and Prasad (2017: 72) claim that the delayed process of identifying the rightful assignees through the “social enumeration survey” was a deliberate tactic of the state government aimed at ensuring that assignees sold their lands. Many assigned landholders did indeed sell their plots after the project was announced, because of the immediate increase in land values. The value of the *lanka* lands at Uddandarayunipalem, for example, shot up from 500,000 rupees to 5,000,000 rupees per acre during that time. Many who still had land deeds sold their land on the open market to outsiders, in contravention of the Prohibition of Transfer Act of 1977. A Madiga farmer in Uddandarayunipalem told me that he had sold one acre of

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\(^{54}\) Based on a conversation with activists representing local NGOs and People’s Organizations, July 2, 2016. See also Ramachandraiah (2016: 73).

\(^{55}\) Interview with the Deputy Collector for the CRDA in Penumaka, Radakrishnaya, September 8, 2016.


\(^{57}\) Interview with Mallela Seshagiri Rao, November 27, 2016.
assigned land, adding that he had not sold it to a fellow SC, because “SCs do not have that kind of money.”

According to a fact-finding report conducted by the NAPM in December 2014, a total of 3,500 acres of privately owned agricultural lands were transferred within a month before the official announcement of the capital-city project, involving a sum of 40,000,000,000 rupees, “almost the entire amount paid in cash” (NAPM 2014). In other words, many of the transactions made before and after the announcement of the project were undertaken through unofficial “agreements” between the buyer and the seller, and not as registered transactions (Ramachandraiah 2016: 71). There are no available figures on how much assigned land has been sold in the region since 2014, but there has been considerable speculation by social activists and local people that many of the transacted assigned lands were bought by influential TDP leaders (Ramachandraiah 2016: 73). Often, when I asked assignees to whom they had sold their land, they would answer “nayakulu” (political leaders). Human rights lawyer Mallela Seshagiri Rao claims that of “these 33,000 acres (of private agricultural land in the proposed capital region), 17,000 have been bought by big-wigs—all MPs [Members of Parliament], ministers.” Many hold that government politicians bought land under fake names (benami names) for a fraction of the market price (Ramachandraiah 2016: 73), but there is no concrete evidence to prove these allegations.

## Unemployment among the landless agricultural class

The employment situation for the landless agricultural class in the proposed capital region has worsened sharply since the LPS was implemented in January 2015. As explained, this grouping is made up largely of Dalits living on the village peripheries. They are dependent on daily wages from agricultural work (kuli)—sowing, planting, weeding, harvesting, etc.—provided by the upper-caste landowning farmers. According to the 2011 census, there are in the proposed capital region approximately 30,000 people whose livelihoods depend primarily on agricultural labor. Their situation has worsened as lands are pooled, or otherwise acquired, by the government of Andhra Pradesh: the work available has plummeted—by 95%

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59 Interview with Mallela Seshagiri Rao, November 27, 2016.

60 Census of India, Guntur District, 2011: [http://www.censusindia.gov.in/2011census/dchb/2817_PART_B_DCHB_GUNTUR.pdf](http://www.censusindia.gov.in/2011census/dchb/2817_PART_B_DCHB_GUNTUR.pdf), accessed November 4, 2017. However, these figures might be outdated, as Vakulabharanam and Prasad (2017: 72) estimate that there are 60,000 agricultural workers in Thullur mandal alone.
on average over 29 villages, with some local variations. In Nidamarru, Undavalli, and Penumaka, where there was substantial opposition to the LPS, agricultural work diminished between 40% to 70%. Elsewhere in the region, where close to 100% of the agricultural land has been pooled, there is virtually no agricultural work available.

The government, through the CRDA, is aware of the major employment changes for the landless labor class caused by pooling 33,000 acres of farmland. In an interview, Prabakhara Reddy, former Director of IT and Social Development for the CRDA, noted the social consequences of the Land Pooling Scheme, which he claimed was 100% completed:

The agriculture is not going on now, as the entire land has been given to land pooling by farmers. There are agricultural laborers and the poorest of the poor who depend on the agriculture.  

Although it is incorrect to say that the “entire land” has been given to the government, it is nonetheless true that in most villages virtually all agriculture has stopped. As predicted by the Sivaramakrishnan Report (p. 13), the capital-city project has “seriously displace(d) work force, rendering them unemployed.” Therefore, the CRDA has initiated—or stated that they would initiate—welfare schemes specifically for the poorer communities in the region.

Many of the welfare provisions under the LPS have been not been implemented at all, whereas some of the programs have started, albeit half-heartedly. In the following I examine each of these programs, assessing the economic situation among the poorest and most marginalized population of the region: landless Dalits.

**Agricultural pensions**

Under the “Amaravati landless poor pension” scheme, the government is committed to paying 2,500 rupees for 10 years to households classified as landless and under the poverty line (annual income under 60,000 rupees). However, this monthly pension is wholly inadequate, as well as being substantially less than what agricultural workers in capital region used to earn before the LPS. Daily wages varied, depending on the village, but in general female workers earned 8,000 rupees and male workers 12,000 rupees per month (Vakulabharanam and Prasad 2017: 72). The new pension of 2,500 rupees is paid to each household, not to each worker—so a household where both the mother and father worked daily in the fields used to earn an

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61 Interview with Prabakhara Reddy, former Director of IT and Social Development for the CRDA, November 18, 2016.
average 20,000 rupees a month, according to the above-cited estimates. Moreover, some of the children in a household usually worked in the fields after coming of age.

Landless villagers lamented their financial situation after the LPS, stressing that the agricultural pensions that the government had provided since mid-June 2015 were insufficient to meet their daily needs. Many agricultural workers told me that the monthly sum of 2,500 rupees is enough for about 10 days; then additional work must be found, to be able to feed the family for the rest of the month. Some found petty jobs in the village, or mercantile activities in nearby towns and cities like Guntur and Vijayawada. Many travelled long distances to find agricultural work outside the region—and many sat at home idle.

Political parties like the CPI(M) and social justice organizations like the Dalit Bahujan Front have urged that the agricultural pension be raised. The CPI(M) argued that on average agricultural workers earn 300 rupees a day, so the government should pay at least 9,000 rupees to landless households in the proposed capital region. Medha Patkar, convenor of the National Alliance of People’s Movements (NAPM), has demanded a monthly pension of 15,000 rupees for these landless households, and declared that the monthly pension of 2,500 rupees is turning this section of society into “beggars” (The Hindu: 2015). The Dalit Bahujan Front has demanded that the agricultural pension of 2,500 rupees be paid to each individual worker, not to the household as a whole.

The agricultural pension is usually transferred to the bank account of the male head of the family, who often squanders the money on drink. In Penumaka, after the government had begun to provide the agricultural pension, I observed greater alcohol abuse among the men in the palli. Alcoholism was already a problem among the male population in the landless working class, but I argue that it was exacerbated by the agricultural pension, because this was money provided for free, without the associated dignity of work.

I observed a tendency similar to that which Still (2014a: Ch. 7) describes from her fieldwork: unemployed men unable to perform the masculine role of family provider seek to reassert their dominance in other ways, as by abusing and beating their wives. Such feelings of emasculation were often expressed as suspicions of unfaithfulness on the part of the spouse (Still 2014a: 166). I once witnessed a situation in which a woman left home with her young daughter. She was thrown out by her husband who had been drinking heavily, after receiving 2,500 rupees as agricultural pension. This woman was a teacher in a private school, whereas

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62 Interview with Babu Rao, regional CPI(M) convener, November 16, 2016.
64 Interview with Bhagya Rao, the National Secretary for Dalit Bahujan Front, June 25, 2016
her husband did not have a job. He accused her of having an affair, because he had seen her speaking to someone on the phone. Although she explained that had been talking to a parent to one of her students, he did not believe her and threw her out. She stood outside the house, crying and shouting at her husband. Then, when she moved up the stairs to the house he pushed her down again so she almost fell over. She took her confused daughter by the hand and walked away, tears rolling down her cheeks.

**Skill development programs**

According to the *Vision 2029* document, the government is committed to “transforming excess agricultural labour-force into productive and skilled manufacturing labour-force.” In the proposed capital region, this transformation is to be facilitated through skill development programs, which, according to LPS rules, are intended to “provide training with stipend to enhance the skills of cultivating tenants, agricultural labourers and other needy persons.” Referring to landless agricultural workers who have lost their livelihoods, Prabakhara Reddy explained, “they want to change their livelihood, they want to seek some other job, they want to join in some other work. To change their livelihood activity, we are supporting in terms of skill development.”

These programs are aimed primarily at educated youth, but there is also training available for unskilled laborers, intended to prepare people for a specific type of work (IT, engineering, handicrafts, sewing etc.). On the CRDA website, the government proclaims its accomplishments concerning the “skill development programs” in the propose capital region: 483 people are said to have been trained and 386 people have been placed in jobs, within the IT sector, pharmaceutical services, marketing etc. However, providing 386 jobs is as nothing when we recall that 30,000 agricultural laborers have lost their livelihoods as a result of the capital-city project.

There was discontent also among the educated young people who participated in the skill development programs. I once spoke with a young man with a B-Tech degree who, together with 150 other students, had completed a six-month skill development program. He said that the program had cost the government 15,000,000 rupees, but at the end of the

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66 GO.Ms.No.1 Dated 01.01.2015: Land Pooling Scheme rules (draft), pp 16.
67 Interview with Prabakhara Reddy, former Director of IT and Social Development for the CRDA, November 18, 2016.
program only two of the students got employment, while 148 were left with nothing. The students staged a *dharna* (sit-in) at the CRDA office, shouting, “the CRDA spent 1.5 *crore* [i.e. 15,000,000 rupees]—provided jobs for two people.” This resembles what Cross (2009: 376) refers to as the “blighted hope” inherent in the contrast between imagined and actual work conditions on a factory floor in a Special Economic Zone in Andhra Pradesh.

Regarding the promise to provide free health facilities to the capital region, the CRDA has held “mega-health camps” three times, where local people received free medical treatment. The government has not yet initiated the fee reimbursement program for higher education. One NTR canteen, providing breakfast and lunch at nominal cost, has been established in Velagapudi. With other promises, such as establishing homes for the elderly and constructing houses for the homeless, nothing has been done. On the whole, the welfare programs stipulated under the LPS rules have been pursued only half-heartedly by the government. In my view, these welfare programs for the poor have not only proven inadequate: they are part of the “regime of co-option” (Ramachandraiah 2016) outlined above.

**Labor and the lack of dissent**

According to the master plans developed by the Singapore consortium, 5.6 million jobs will be generated in the new capital city by 2050. It is not specified how so many jobs could be provided, and many critics find these projections unrealistic (Vakulabharanam and Prasad 2017: 72; Ramachandraiah 2015; 2016).

According to the Land Pooling Scheme, it is the responsibility of the state government to “engage tractors belonging to residents for construction activity.” There were indeed many tractors transporting large amounts of sand and other construction materials in the proposed capital region while I was there in 2016, but very few of them were local. One tractor driver in Penumaka told me that he used to drive five or six times a day before the project was announced, but now he got far fewer jobs. He showed me a logbook over his tractor jobs, in which nothing had been entered during the past month.

Many landless workers in the villages surrounding the Temporary Capital Secretariat had believed they would find employment in the construction of this complex. But when I visited the site in 2016, when the Assembly was still under construction, I found that many, if

70 Draft Perspective Plan for the Capital Region, March 2015.
71 GO.Ms.No.1 Dated 01.01.2015: Land Pooling Scheme rules (draft): Schedule III (iii).
not most, of the workers came from other states (see also Vakulabharanam and Prasad 2017: 73). Many were from Bihar, Orissa and Chhattisgarh; some were from other parts of Andhra Pradesh, and a few were from nearby villages in the region. Local workers told me that, to get a construction job there, you had to be young, slim, and fair-skinned.

According to Weiner (1978), there are often “nativist movements” opposed to ethnically different migrant groups who compete for the same employment opportunities, or other resources. And yet, in the proposed capital region there has not been any such response from the local population. Why not? The landless, unskilled laborers in region are certainly not content with a situation in which their main source of livelihood—agricultural work—has been drastically diminished, but there has been very little resistance as regards the LPS, the capital-city project, and the competition with migrant workers for available unskilled work.

In trying to explain this lack of dissent, I highlight two strategies of co-optation directed at this section of society. The first is that, by proposing to give a monthly pension of 2,500 rupees to landless agricultural workers, the government engaged in a form of negotiation with this class as well as with the activists claiming to represent this class. When political parties and civil organizations advocated for higher sums, the government responded positively to their demands: they would consider the matter, but it would take time.

Still (2011b) observes that Dalits often have an “optimistic view of the state,” because they are interested in the benefits that the state might provide. Thus, when Dalits in the proposed capital region were offered 2,500 rupees a month, many of them saw it as better than nothing—and feared that if they voiced opposition they would not receive this agricultural pension.

The second strategy of co-option relates to the marketing of the world-class city. Although the development plans for the capital city set out few jobs for unskilled workers, many landless agriculturalists believed that the development of infrastructure and the influx of private companies would bring direct and indirect economic opportunities to the region. I spoke with many Dalits who thought that educated youth could benefit from these developments.

In an interview Purendra Prasad explained:
They [the Dalits] visualize that in the new urban economy they are going to find jobs in that kind of situation [in the capital city]. Those hopes, dreams and aspirations are what keep them going, looking forward to the new opportunities that will unfold very soon.  

Thus, among the landless Dalit communities the desire for infrastructure development and employment opportunities became an attachment (Moore 2011), which produced paradoxical responses among agricultural workers: they endorsed the capital-city project even though they said that they now had less work. What they emphasized was “development”: our state will be developed, and that is good.”  

However, the fact is rather, as indicated by Vakulabharanam and Prasad (2017: 73), that with the government’s vision of development labor will become “degraded and fragmented in unprecedented ways.” The agricultural workforce in the proposed capital region is likely to be released into the open labor market, vulnerable to exploitation (ibid.: 72).  

The way in which landless agricultural workers, tenants, and marginal landowners have been marginalized as to employment and economic opportunity in the course of the project resembles a neoliberal logic that is punitive towards the poor (Ortner 2016). Drawing on Karen Ho’s (2009) ethnography of Wall Street bankers, Sherry Ortner (2016: 58) argues that job insecurity and “the culture of precarity” have become deeply normalized, even positively valued as signs of corporate flexibility and strength. I argue that a similar logic informs the development model which the government of Andhra Pradesh has been implementing in the proposed capital region, through its Land Pooling Scheme.  

**Legality of the capital-city project**  
Human rights lawyer and social activist, Mallela Seshagiri Rao, told me in an interview that there were 22 court cases pending in the High Court in Hyderabad when the government of Andhra Pradesh invited national and international leaders to attend the ceremony for laying the foundation stone for the start-up area known as the Seed Capital. The Chief Justice of the High Court did not attend the ceremony—despite the ongoing cases, and the fact that the area where the foundation stone would be laid consisted of flood plains and the National Green Tribunal had ordered a halt on all construction in that area.  

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72 Interview with Purendra Prasad, November 11, 2016.  
73 Based on a conversation with Dalits in Penumaka, August 19, 2016.  
74 Interview with Mallela Seshagiri Rao, November 27, 2016.
Some of the court cases that have accumulated since project launch relate to the government’s procurement of land through the Land Pooling Scheme. In March 2015, hundreds of farmers—primarily from the oppositional villages of Nidamarru, Undavalli, and Penumaka—who had sent objection forms (9.2) to the government concerning their non-compliance with the LPS, went to the High Court to demand that the CRDA stop interfering with their cultivation work. They went with the political backing of the MLA for the Mangaligiri constituency, Alla Ramakrishna Reddy, of the opposition party, YSRCP (see Preface). He pointed out to the single-judge bench that, according to the CRDA Act (2014), the LPS is explicitly voluntary. Therefore, when landowner sends an objection form to the CRDA, that person’s name is to be removed from the government registry. Instead, the government had reacted by threatening to cut the electricity to the fields belonging to farmers not participating in the LPS (Ramachandraiah 2016: 73). After having considered the facts, the judge directed the Commissioner for the CRDA to delete the names of the landowners who had sent in objection forms to the government regarding the Land Pooling Scheme. This High Court verdict was considered a major victory among farmers and activists opposed to the capital-city project.

There were also several cases pending in the High Court relating to the provisions in the Land Acquisition Act of 2013. Landowners who were unwilling to part with their land under the Land Pooling Scheme were notified by the government that it would acquire the land under the terms of the Land Acquisition Act. Mallela Seshagiri Rao, who represents unwilling farmers, has filed several complaints to the High Court alleging that the government has not met the requirements under this Act. His organization has filed complaints regarding the government’s failure to publish information regarding land acquisition in the regional language, failure to notify the affected families correctly, and failure to classify the lands correctly (as “dry” or “wet” land).

**The Swiss Challenge approach**

In allocating the infrastructure development project of the start-up area of approximately 1690 acres in the capital city to a private company, the state government resorted to the “Swiss Challenge” approach. The Swiss Challenge, as defined in the Andhra Pradesh Infrastructure

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75 Interview with Alla Ramakrishna Reddy, November 26, 2016.
76 Mallela Seshagiri Rao is the President of the 1,400-member Capital Region Farmers’ Association.
Enabling Act (2001)\textsuperscript{77} Article 19 (II.), is initiated by a private company which submits an “unsolicited or sou-motu” proposal to undertake the project. The government then forwards the proposal to the Infrastructure Authority, which shall consider it, and if it finds merit with the proposal the Authority is to encourage the government to invite competitive counter-proposals from other private companies. On the basis of a bidding round, the government then chooses the offer best suited for the project.

The government of Andhra Pradesh claimed that they had received an unsolicited proposal from a consortium of Singapore companies, Ascendas-Singbridge and Sembcorp Development Limited, after the capital-city project was announced. In fact, however, the government of Andhra Pradesh signed a Memorandum of Understanding with the government of Singapore on 8 December 2014 (Vakulabharanam and Prasad 2017: 70), in which it is stated: “one or more Singapore private sector entities [shall be] the master developers (…) of the seed development (of the capital city).”\textsuperscript{78} In other words, the proposal from the Singapore consortium was not “unsolicited or suo-motu.” The government did not send the original proposal to the Infrastructure Authority, but instead obtained approval from the Cabinet and the Chief Minister before sending it for counter-offers.\textsuperscript{79}

Two Indian construction companies filed petitions in the High Court and a single-judge bench ordered a stay to the bidding process on September 12, 2016, on the grounds that the bidding round had been conducted in haste and lacked transparency (\textit{Deccan Chronicle}: 2016).\textsuperscript{80} The High Court judge noted that the government of Andhra Pradesh had required that construction companies must have international experience in infrastructure development in order to submit a proposal, a requirement that excluded many prominent Indian construction companies from the bidding process.\textsuperscript{81}

When confronted with the stay from the High Court, the government of Andhra Pradesh first challenged it, but then withdrew its petition. Instead, it promulgated an ordinance to


\textsuperscript{79} Interview with Ramachandraiah, November 26, 2016.


\textsuperscript{81} Interview with Sobhanadreeswara Rao, November 20, 2016.
amend the AP Infrastructure Enabling Act (2001) by incorporating a provision stating that the original project proposal need not go through the Infrastructure Authority.\(^82\)

**Natural hazards**

Several social activists and environmentalists filed petitions concerning the natural hazards of constructing the new capital city in the area between Guntur and Vijayawada. In February 2015, social activist P. Srimannarayana approached the Supreme Court, but was directed to the National Green Tribunal in New Delhi (which deals with cases relating to the environment). There, he filed a petition, citing peer-reviewed research (see Manne et al. 2011) showing that the area in and around Vijayawada is classified as Seismic Zone III (Moderate Damage Risk Zone), and is therefore not suited for construction of the new capital city.

During the same year, retired IAS (Indian Administrative Service) officer, E.A.S. Sarma, filed a petition in the National Green Tribunal, challenging the environmental clearance for construction of the capital city over an area of 217 km\(^2\), which the state government received from the State Environmental Impact Assessment Authority (SEIAA) in September 2015. The Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) report\(^83\) had been prepared by a private company, TATA Consulting Engineers, and submitted to the SEIAA. Initially, the SEIAA found “shortcomings” in the report, but soon thereafter the agency approved the report.

Sarma argued in his petition that the EIA report lacked reference to studies regarding potential ecological damage and natural hazards, and that the approval by the SEIAA had been granted in haste.\(^84\) Among the points noted by Sarma was that the EIA report did not include a hydro-geological impact assessment study of the flood plains in the region. According to the EIA report (p. 63), 13,500 acres of land are inundated by monsoon flooding every year from a tributary of the Krishna River, the Kondaveeti Vagu— and 10,600 acres of this land lie within the proposed capital region. According to the EIA report, the government of Andhra Pradesh had initiated a hydro-geological impact assessment study, but Sarma maintained that the study had not been carried out, citing government sources saying that such a study is “not warranted.”\(^85\)

\(^82\) Interview with Ramachandraiah, November 26, 2016.
\(^84\) National Green Tribunal: Appeal No. 148 of 2015.
\(^85\) National Green Tribunal: Appeal No. 148 of 2015: 15.
Former CRDA Commissioner N. Srikanth went on record as proposing that the 10,600 acres could be raised by 2 meters—a process that would cost 1,500,000,000 rupees (The Hindu: 2015). On hearing this argument, the National Green Tribunal judges expressed doubt that such an operation would be viable (Deccan Chronicle: 2016).

Another part of the hydro-geological impact argument is that the flood plains contain large quantities of water, a quality which will be destroyed with the proposed urbanization. A group of activists and engineers developed an alternative plan for construction of the new capital city, called Amaravati Natural City (Soni and Khosla 2016). These designers argue that the seasonal floods from the Krishna River and Kondaveeti Vagu deposit large quantities of sand on the flood plains by the river and its tributary. Due to the high proportion of sand, these soils can contain 35%–40% water (Soni and Khosla 2016: 13), making them alluvial and fertile. The designers go on to argue that 90 km² of flood plains could provide 1 million people with perennial water supply (ibid.: 15). By leaving 2.5 kilometers of flood plains on the side of the Krishna River the government could ensure water supply for the entire population of the proposed city, and the reserved patches of flood plains could be cultivated by local farmers. However, the government has not responded to the alternative plans developed by this group of activists and engineers.

Since the soil of the flood plains is alluvial, it also gives rise to issues concerning the foundation-bearing capacity for high-rise buildings, as already pointed out in the Sivaramakrishnan Report (p. 13). This problem became evident with the construction of the Temporary Secretariat in 2015, when one of the secretariat buildings sank three inches during the construction of the second floor. A reasonable explanation for the fact that, at the time of completion in 2017, all the secretariat buildings were no more than two stories high is that the government was not confident that the soil could carry the weight of taller buildings.

All these arguments, concerning the seismicity, flood plains and weight-bearing capacities, have been presented to the National Green Tribunal. The final verdict from the court is still pending as of this writing, but in October 2015 the Tribunal directed the government of Andhra Pradesh not to conduct any construction operations in the proposed capital area until environmental clearance had been obtained (Ramachandraiah 2016: 74). In

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88 Interview with Anumali Gandhi, who was involved with the design, November 21, 2016.
89 Based on interviews with Ramachandraiah, November 26, 2016, and with Mallela Seshagiri Rao, November 27, 2016.
the same month the state government openly ignored this Tribunal order by laying the foundation stone for the Seed Capital, which is on flood plains. Since that time, the government has continuously disregarded the order by building the Temporary Secretariat, as well as roads, in the area.

**The CRDA Act versus Indian law**

The CRDA Act (2014) violates several state-level and national acts, as well as (possibly) the Indian Constitution. According to the Indian Constitution (31A), a state government cannot procure land unless backed by a law that has received assent from the President of India. However, the government of Andhra Pradesh passed the CRDA Act (2014) in order to procure land, without resorting to the Land Acquisition Act (2013), thus avoiding the provisions in that Act which would make it difficult and expensive for the state government to acquire 33,000 acres of privately owned agricultural land. However, the CRDA Act has not yet received the assent of the President of India.

The government of Andhra Pradesh may think that it can bypass provisions in the Indian Constitution because it is procuring the land through a voluntary agreement between the government and the landowners. But, according to Article 31A of the Constitution, any law relating to the acquisition of land, even if by agreement, must follow the provisions for compensating the landowners according to market price, as well as other provisions in the Constitution. In addition, the state government, in acquiring privately owned land in the capital region, is applying two laws at the same time: the Land Pooling Scheme under the CRDA Act (2014), and the Land Acquisition Act (2013). The compensation package—including resettlement and rehabilitation—is different in each of these laws and relates differently to those from whom the government is acquiring land. Simultaneous implementation of these two laws is arguably a violation of Article 14, which guarantees equality before the law. Moreover, the whole project may be in violation of Article 19 of the Constitution, which guarantees the freedom to practice any profession, because tens of thousands of agricultural workers have lost their profession of working on the fields in the capital region.

In addition to possibly violating the Constitution of India, the CRDA Act (2014) clearly violates several other national and state-level laws. As mentioned above, the CRDA Act

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91 Interview with Mallela Seshagiri Rao, November 27, 2016. See also Ramachandraiah (2016: 74).
(2014) deviates from the Land Acquisition Act (2013); I have argued that the government of Andhra Pradesh has deliberately tried to avoid resorting to this law. However, the CRDA Act (2014) also violates the National Food Security Act (2013), which prohibits “unwarranted diversion of land and water from food production.” Moreover, it violates the Biological Diversity Act (2002), intended to safeguard biodiversity in India. The area designated for the construction of the new capital city in Andhra Pradesh is made up of very fertile agricultural belts, with a high degree of biodiversity—here have even been plans to apply for entry in the Guinness Book of Records for the biodiversity in that region (Outlook: 2014).

According to Article 55(1) of the Biological Diversity Act (2002), violations of the provisions of the Act punishable by up to five years imprisonment.

The CRDA Act (2014) also violates various state-level acts. Oddly enough, in the Land Pooling Scheme consent form (9.3), which landowners wishing to participate in the LPS fill out and send to the CRDA, it is stated:


In my view, there is a sort of admission in that clause: the government knows that the agreement does indeed violate all of these state-level acts. However, with the disclaimer cited above, the government seeks to absolve itself of all legal responsibility in regard to these laws. As mentioned above, the state government has been violating the Andhra Pradesh Assigned Land (Prohibition of Transfer) Act (1977) by not compensating assignees in the capital region for the land that they have transferred for the construction of the capital city—and according to the Deputy Collector of Penumaka, it is aware of doing so.

In the LPS development agreement form (9.14), which is irrevocable, the CRDA “reserves the right to cancel this agreement at any point of time without giving any reason

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95 Land Pooling Scheme rules, Form 9.3.
Thus, landowners who have signed this agreement have no claim over the land that they have surrendered to the government, and no guarantee that the government will give them re-constituted plots in return. Farmer and social activist Anumali Gandhi has called this LPS development agreement form a “farmer suicide note.” During an interview, he argued that the only thing landowners could do to re-claim the land that they surrendered to the government by signing this form is to go to court and allege that they were not properly informed about the Land Pooling Scheme before they signed it.\textsuperscript{97}

**Projections for (and by) the elite**

Why locate the new capital city next to the River Krishna, which is flood-prone, and where the weight-bearing capacity of the soil is not suitable for construction? Why not move the capital city further inland, where Kammas dominate and there is more support for the TDP? And why would the government build a temporary secretariat, when they already have plans for building a permanent one? There have been various foundation-laying ceremonies (*bhumi pooja*), but very little actual construction in the capital region. There was one ceremony for the laying of the foundation stone in May 2015, and then another one in October that year. In October 2016, there were foundation-laying ceremonies for the Government City and the Finance City. What is the reason for all these ceremonies?

In my view, the government has been marketing the project as a speculative venture while at the same time deliberately employing symbolism to appeal to popular sentiments around the regional identity of Andhra Pradesh.

**Strategies of speculation**

Kennedy and Sood (2016) note the renewed interest in India towards greenfield development projects, accompanied by a growing tendency to instrumentalize urbanization in pursuit of economic growth. Since the 1990s, state governments have begun developing urban peripheries, in order to release land resources onto the open market. Examples include Hitec City on the western periphery of Hyderabad and various infrastructural projects around Bangalore. In such rapidly growing cities, mega-city projects are seen as a means of

\textsuperscript{96} Land Pooling Scheme rules, Form 9.14: xxviii.

\textsuperscript{97} Interview with Anumali Gandhi, November 21, 2016.
upgrading urban infrastructure, but they also create what Shatkin (2011: 88) calls a “landscape of anticipation.”

In analyzing world-city projects in Bangalore, Goldman (2011: 246) argues: “it is becoming clear that much more money can be made from the conversion of undervalued rural and urban economies into world-city projects than from the actual infrastructure project.” He calls this strategy “speculative urbanism,” and cites the construction of an airport north of Bangalore as an example. Bangalore International Airport, opened in 2008, covers an area of over 4,050 acres—roughly 35% more than London Heathrow—although only a fraction of the traffic passes through the airport in Bangalore (John 2005: 1015–1016). Traditionally, landing fees have been the main source of airport revenues, but in this case it seems that the business model seeks viability from “airport-related services”—renting out space for shops, offices, restaurants and hotels (ibid.: 1016).

In Andhra Pradesh, the government is actively pursuing a strategy of speculative urbanism in various parts of the state. In Machilipatnam, for example, the state government has declared its intention to acquire 33,601 acres of land, stretching over 21 villages, for the construction of a port and an industrial corridor. Former Minister of Agriculture, Vadde Sobhanadreeswara Rao, told me in an interview that the government wants 5,000 acres for port development and 31,000 acres for “port-related industries.” In his view, there is no rationale for the acquisition of such large areas for a port. He has been quoted in The Deccan Chronicle as arguing: “nowhere in the entire country, any seaport has been developed on a land of more than 5,000 acres. Machilipatnam port is a minor port and hence, 2,300 acres of land is enough for its development.” However, by taking into account the inflation in real-estate value that accompanies the announcement of a mega-city project (an airport, IT corridor, SEZ, etc.) we can begin to grasp the rationale behind such development projects.

Levien (2012: 953) argues that state governments in India have become “land-brokering states.” Building on this argument, I see the government of Andhra Pradesh as a land-brokering state with a unique possibility to influence and hype the real-estate market within its own state by declaring that the landscape will be transformed into a “world-city” mega-project. The announced conversion of the land creates anticipation in the real-estate market, from which the state government can profit from directly by selling or renting out at inflated land prices. Thus, the government creates a “dreamscape” (Goldman 2011: 234) in which speculators and local populations alike can invest their assets and visions for the future.

98 Interview with Sobhanadreeswara Rao, November 20, 2016.
The capital-city project in Andhra Pradesh exemplifies this strategy, because the project is characterized by the government’s aspirations for conspicuously large tracts of land for its development. According to the “master plans,” this city is to be situated in a capital region of some 3,420 km\(^2\)—almost five times the size of New York City (some 784 km\(^2\)). More importantly: the whole project is permeated with a speculative logic.

**Hyping the market**

A news article published in *The Deccan Chronicle* on October 11, 2016 reported that the government of Andhra Pradesh planned to mortgage some of the land which it had received from landowners in the capital region through the Land Pooling Scheme.\(^{100}\) The strategy was referred to as the “CIDCO method” (after the City and Industry Development Corporation in Maharashtra); it entails mortgaging some land and using that money to build infrastructure in other areas. Once real-estate prices rise as a result of the infrastructure development, the government can profit from selling the developed land as plots.

This strategy was repeatedly explained to me by people who endorsed the capital-city project. Palepu Rama Rao, a Kamma, and prominent TDP politician in Penumaka during the 1980s who now owns a film studio in Hyderabad, told me: “Chandrababu Naidu has a vision on how to convert one lakh crore \([1,000,000,000,000\text{ rupees}]\) deficit into profit.”\(^{101}\) He explained that the strategy was based on the development of Amaravati as the new capital city for Andhra Pradesh. The government’s strategy, he said, was to build infrastructure on agricultural land in the capital region, and then sell 40% of the land as plots to national and international companies. The profit made from the land transactions can then be used to repay debt. “Chandrababu Naidu is an economist, and he knows what he is talking about,” Palepu Rama Rao concluded.

Land prices in many parts of the region did experience a massive boom with the announcement of the capital-city project. In Krishnayapalem, for example, land prices soared from 200,000 rupees per acre to 1,400,000 rupees per acre. That is the reason why landowners in this part of the capital region will say that Chandrababu Naidu is like a god, because he managed—virtually overnight—to multiply the value of their land. But the market prices for the capital region have fluctuated since the project was announced in 2014. It seems as if the market (i.e. investor interest) has responded to the political dynamics around the government

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\(^{100}\) “State plans to mortgage land to raise resources,” *The Deccan Chronicle*, October 11, 2016.

\(^{101}\) Interview with Palepu Rama Rao, October 16, 2016.
and the perceived ability of the government to implement and complete the capital-city project. CPI(M) convener for the capital region, Babu Rao, told me, “it is like a stock market—the capital city. The land rates were totally fluctuating. [If there is] any political development, it will reflect on the capital city. (...) Daily, national and state level, all incidents are related to the land rates.”

This perspective might explain why the state government has arranged so many foundation-laying ceremonies, and why it found it necessary to build a temporary secretariat before constructing the permanent one. It might also explain why the government has been distributing land to corporations at throw-away prices—like transferring 200 acres to the Vellore Institute of Technology and 150 acres to the Indo–UK Institute of Health, for approximately 5,000,000 rupees per acre, substantially less than the land prices in the “master plans.” In some cases, the government has even given land to corporations for free, boasting about it in the press, saying that it will bring jobs and industry to the region.

In analyzing these conspicuous activities of the Andhra Pradesh government in relation to the capital-city project, I draw on Leins (2013: 218), who argues that “stock market forecasts are performative; they actively contribute to the construction of financial markets” (italics in original). Similarly, I hold that these activities on the part of the government of Andhra Pradesh can be seen as performative activities aimed at communicating to investors and corporations that the construction of the capital city is an active reality. Whenever confidence in the capital city project appears to be faltering, the government engineers some event to assure the public that now development is happening, now is the time to invest.

The Amaravati capital-city project exemplifies what Appadurai (2013) calls “politics of probability”—which, he argues, is the common form of governmentality and which consists of calculating and accounting for the future. In his view, governmentality worldwide has increasingly taken on the character of a risk-managing enterprise, using accounting as a tool for managing expectations. Drawing on Knight (1921), he makes the point that profit arises out of uncertainty, and the period since the 1970s has been one in which “the spirit of uncertainty has been reawakened in relation to the unprecedented formalization/abstraction/commercialization of the machinery of risk itself” (Appadurai 2013: 238, italics in original).

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102 Interview with Babu Rao, the CPI(M) convener for the capital region, November 16, 2016.
104 Based on interviews with Ramachandraiah, November 26, 2016, and Sobhanadreeswara Rao, November 20, 2016.
I argue that the Land Pooling Scheme introduced a situation of heightened uncertainty among the people of the capital region, in which those with economic start capital, cultural understanding of speculative finance and political influence to sway markets stood to benefit enormously. This has been a case of “manufactured uncertainty” (Beck 1999:112) which powerful, well-connected people could take advantage of—whereas for those without economic, cultural and social capital, the uncertainty translated into precarity.

**Vastu Shastra**

An interesting aspect of the project is that the “master plans” incorporate the ancient Hindu architectural belief system known as *Vastu Shastra*. *Vastu Shastra* (or vastu, in short) is Sanskrit for “the science of architecture” and forms part of the ancient body of Vedic knowledge. It relates to the orientation of mortals (humans) together with the immortals (gods and goddesses) and nature (Venugopal 2012: 4). The principles of *vastu* have been used primarily in relation to the orientation of buildings, as well as the home interior (rooms, doors, and windows), but they also relate to town planning, temple architecture, painting and sculpturing (ibid.).

Thomas Birtchnell (2016) holds that compliance with *vastu* is a form of spirituality that has become increasingly important with the privatization of the urban landscape for globalized newly rich Indians, as their sense of the sacred comes into conflict with the privatizing logic of the “neoliberal city.” The principles of *vastu* are communicated by “*vastu* consultants,” and are incorporated into hyper-modern architectural projects, such as the 27-story Antilla skyscraper in Mumbai (Birtchnell 2016: 2353).

When the Singapore consortium first submitted their “master plan” for the development of the capital city in Andhra Pradesh, it was sent in return because it did not take *vastu* into consideration (*The Guardian*: 2016). Since then, the designers have managed to incorporate the ancient principles into their plan, thereby giving the project greater legitimacy in the eyes of many Hindus.

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According to the final “master plan,” the location of the capital city is very fortunate because of its close proximity to the Krishna River, which runs in a northeasterly direction, and which brings with it winds with “positive flow of energy.” In addition, the location is auspicious because of the many axes that run through the city in a triangle: the Amaravati town in the north, Kanaka Durga temple in the south, and the Neerukunda hill in the southwest. Many people, whether they were critical to the project or endorsed it, told me that the government decided to locate the capital city by the river because the vastu auspiciousness of this site had been pointed out to the Chief Minister.

Andhra Desa

The government’s marketing of the auspices of vastu compliance is an indication that the project was designed for and by the same elite. “Amaravati is indeed being produced as a space for global capital investments,” Carol Upadhya (2017: 179) writes, “but I argue that it is the (trans)regional political elite and provincial capital (who also currently control the state machinery) who are the main agents and beneficiaries of this transformation.”

Her argument is that the Amaravati project represents a process of “re-territorialization” by the regional business class, which consists largely of Kammans (the “farmer-capitalist class”). Although members of this class are now dispersed throughout India and elsewhere, they retain a sense of belongingness as regards the state of Andhra Pradesh (Upadhya 2017: 178). The government is therefore appealing to them to see the capital-city project as an opportunity to invest in their homeland: “the vision of the future that is represented by the planned city is not just one of anticipated wealth or progress but also one of a reinvigorated Andhra-desa” [Andhra-nation] (ibid.: 190).

106 City Master Plan, July 2015: 32. See also Ramachandraiah (2015: 11).
To this end, the state government deploys deliberate symbolism, like performing foundation-laying ceremonies. In connection with the laying of the foundation stone for the Seed Capital, soil and water from villages all across the state was collected and used during the ceremony (ibid.: 191–192). The emphasis on vastu is also a symbolic appeal to the cosmology of the de-territorialized business class of Andhra Pradesh. The government has been marketing the capital-city project as a speculative venture, packaged in Hindu religious symbols and regionalist sentiments. The fact that Chief Minister Chandrababu Naidu also appears concerned with vastu compliance (Greatandhra 2017) substantiates the point that he belongs to the same elite to which these efforts are directed.

**Worlding practices**

In *Worlding Cities*, Aihwa Ong and Ananya Roy argue (2011) that government efforts to redesign urban environments in Asia can be seen as worlding practices whereby they “instantiate some vision of the world in formation,” as Ong writes in his introduction to the volume (Ong 2011: 11). This is an ongoing, aspirational and speculative process that involves inter-city comparisons, referencing, and modelling. Asian governments often look to other Asian cities like Singapore, Shanghai, and Hong Kong, rather than Western cities, as models for urban development. They also draw on concepts such as “world-class” and “sustainability,” fusing them with ideas about entrepreneurialism and modernism (Ong 2011: 14–16).

Throughout this thesis, I have showed how the government of Andhra Pradesh has been following these strategies in developing and marketing the capital-city project as a worlding project. For example, the state government has explicitly drawn inspiration from the “Singapore model” (Huat 2011). Not only were the master plans developed by Singapore-owned consultancy firms—also the infrastructure development project for the Seed Capital was granted to a consortium of Singapore companies through the Swiss Challenge method (*before* the government of Andhra Pradesh received a stay from High Court).

The state government has deployed value-laden concepts such as “world-class,” “sustainable” and “greenfield” in order to arouse aspirations in the people of Andhra Pradesh of being global, competitive and, above all, successful. This is a neoliberal logic that stems from the discourse of individualism, market competition, deregulation, and privatization.

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dominant in the United States and Europe since the 1980s. In India, this discourse gained prominence with the liberalization of the economy in the early 1990s, and has been cultivated by state governments like the TDP-led government of Andhra Pradesh.

The image of neoliberal “success,” promoted in movies, in advertisements, in the press and in televised news, it has obtained a firm hold of the minds of many, if not most, Indians. When the government of Andhra Pradesh is marketing the capital-city project today, it is doing so in an “ideoscape” (Appadurai 1990) deeply embedded with seductive symbols and ideas of prosperity.

Blockmans (2003) argues that new state regimes strive to express their ideology in the urban morphology of capital cities, and often use impressive and readily understandable architecture to communicate this message. Similarly, I propose that the government of Andhra Pradesh, since being re-elected in 2014, has sought to express its ideology of technocratic modernism and rapid economic growth, based on the “Singapore model,” architecturally in the landscape of its new proclaimed capital city. In building the capital city from scratch over 217 square kilometers of highly fertile agricultural lands, the government has been promoting its economic strategy of reducing the agricultural sector, replacing it with the service sector and the mega-city project.

In the absence counter-worlding practices
Ong (2011: 11) holds that while mega-city projects, such as Amaravati, may be seen as worlding practices from above, there could also be practices of counter-worlding from below, in which people express alternative visions and ideologies. In the case of the Amaravati project, however, there has been very little resistance, in terms of those affected expressing alternative, counter-worlding practices. Any dissent has been largely politicized within the familiar sphere of caste-dominated party politics—not even the opposition parties have presented alternative visions. Politicians from the YSCRP and CPI(M) with whom I spoke often said, “we are not against the capital,” or “we are not against development”—indicating that they endorse the idea of the project, but have certain reservations regarding how it has been implemented.

Even more important is the absence of counter-worlding resistance from marginal farmers and landless agriculturalists, who constitute the large majority of the population in the proposed capital region. This sector of the population does not stand to benefit from the Land Pooling Scheme: it robs them of their livelihood. Nonetheless, they have not opposed the
project in any sustained manner, instead remaining optimistic about their future prospects in the capital city. I can only assume that many were deterred from expressing opposition because of the repressive strategies used by the state government in the early stages of the LPS. As one Dalit in Penumaka put it: “no one can oppose the government, because it has all economic power and all police.”

In fact, marginal farmers and landless agricultural workers were convinced by the same use of symbols that was designed to attract interest and investments from the prosperous business class. Thus, in Foucauldian terms, it might be argued that through the sophisticated deployment of power mechanisms, like the use affective imagery and coding, the state government managed to instill the neoliberal logic of the LPS in the minds of landless Dalits, as well as landowners. Also, through misinformation, the government was able to convince the local people of their limited capacity to resist the capital-city plans. Thus, as a result of processes of subjectification, landowners and landless people alike were persuaded to accept the state discourse of “development,” as well as the government’s legal powers to acquire land. Moreover, by more repressive mechanisms, like the deployment of thousands of police officers as well as officers from the Intelligence Bureau, the government succeeded in creating an atmosphere of fear that deterred people from protesting or organizing against the capital-city project.

**Full-fledged disaster**

According to James Scott (1998: 4–5), schemes of urbanization can become “a full-fledged disaster” if coupled with an authoritarian state that is willing and able to implement a high-modernist ideology that ignores local and natural conditions, and the failure of civil society to resist. As an example, he cites the construction of Brasilia, intended as “a city of the future, a city of development” (Scott 1998: 119). But because the Brazilian state oversimplified the urban landscape and neglected social and cultural aspects of the human experience, it became a fiasco, and unplanned slum developments started to appear on the periphery of the city.

The Amaravati capital-city project, I argue, has become a “full-fledged disaster” because of the *hubris* of the state government and its lack of attention to local and natural conditions, as well as the failure by civil society to resist the project. The government is preoccupied with the economic ideology of neoliberalism, which marginalizes the agricultural sector in favor of the service sector. Further, the government has shown utter disregard for those who oppose the LPS, and has also ignored warnings by scientists and activists about the
unsuitable environmental conditions for its choice of location for the capital city. Thirdly, civil society, for the reasons discussed above, has been unable to resist the government’s development scheme.

But whereas Scott (1998) focused on authoritarian regimes of the 20\textsuperscript{th} century, I am analyzing a modern-day example of how a democratically elected state government in India has been attempting to carry out a similar high-modernist urbanization scheme in the 21\textsuperscript{st} century. Because anti-dispossession movements had pushed through new legislation, the government of Andhra Pradesh was forced to resort to the purportedly “voluntary” LPS, instead of simply applying the old Land Acquisition Act from 1894 in order to acquire the land required for the project. It was necessary for the state government to initiate a more sophisticated “regime of knowledge” in order to move ahead with its plans. The fact that the LPS is explicitly “voluntary” represents a potential for resistance, because people can go to court, citing the discrepancies between the government’s rhetoric, on the one hand, and its actions on the other. Indeed, the most powerful strategies of resistance have come from the many lawyers and legal activists who have taken the government to court and demanded that the project be held accountable to Indian law.
4. Conclusions

“Nitya kalyanam pacha toranam”—Telugu proverb which means, in effect, “if there is a wedding every day, we all eat happily.”

By the main road in the palli in Penumaka, a Lambadi (ST) family was constructing a concrete house on the land where they had previously lived in a thatched structure. The plot was officially registered as being “under water” due to its close proximity to a pond (cheyruvu), and as such the construction was illegal. The village president (sarpanch) of Penumaka had told me that he intended to get a path made around the pond and tear down the 300 or so houses “illegally” constructed in that area. However, the Lambadi family did not seem to worry about the official registration status of their plot of land. The head of the household had worked all his life as an agricultural worker and had saved up enough money to build the concrete house, which he wanted to give to his daughter and her husband.

I walked around on the site, talking to the construction workers. A man from East Godavari district told me that he was pleased with the capital-city project, because it had resulted in much construction work for him. While he was praising the government’s development plans, a local laborer interrupted, and declared that he was not happy about the project. He said that it was disastrous that this land which produces three crops a year and has water only 15 feet under the surface would be converted into a concrete jungle. He said, “nitya kalyanam pacha toranam,” a Telugu proverb that means in effect, “if there is a wedding every day, then we all eat happily.” After some discussion between my language assistant and the laborer, I understood that he meant to say that before the capital-city project was announced, there was an abundance of agricultural work available in the area. Since the project began, however, this abundance has been replaced with scarcity for workers like him.

Research questions revisited

Throughout this thesis, I have investigated two questions: 1) why do some landowners decide to surrender their land to the government under the Land Pooling Scheme, while others resist it? 2) how has the project affected the local population, depending on their status?

In seeking to answer the first question, I have examined the wide range of strategies, or mechanisms of power, employed by the government of Andhra Pradesh in order to create
consensus around the capital-city project and the Land Pooling Scheme. The government has focused on appealing to the cosmopolitan business class which is dispersed and de-territorialized but nonetheless feels a sense of belonging in Andhra Pradesh. Thus, the project can be seen as a process aimed at consolidating a regional identity around the state, and gaining legitimacy for both the project and the TDP-led government. I have shown how the government has arranged activities and ceremonies to attract investments and promote the local real-estate market. Thus, I hold, the Amaravati capital-city project, with all the symbolism with which the government has endowed it, can be seen as a twofold appeal to members of the prosperous, de-territorialized, business class from Andhra Pradesh, primarily of the Kamma caste, to come and invest in the new capital city.

In other words, this project has not been designed for the majority of those actually living in the region. That is why the government’s plans to construct the capital city in the fertile agricultural belt along the banks of the River Krishna originally met with local resistance. Only a handful of truly devoted TDP supporters endorsed the project and showed interest in the LPS from the beginning. But then the government resorted to various strategies to convince the landowners, and quell any resistance. Repeated exposure to the seductive images of futuristic skyscrapers, a beautiful riverfront, with greenery and modern infrastructure, together with projections of millions of jobs, persuaded many people, landowners and landless people alike, of the wonders of this new Amaravati. In addition to propagating images of urban fantasies, the government initiated a powerful campaign to convince landowners of its legal powers to acquire land. As this campaign coincided with the ongoing national-level negotiations concerning the legal powers of states to acquire land under the Land Acquisition Act (2013), it exacerbated the confusion in the capital region, and many people came to fear that the government would take their land without providing much compensation.

However, many still had reservations against the LPS, and might conceivably voice their protest. Therefore, the government initiated a “regime of co-option,” using coercive pressure. The deployment of security personnel only days prior to launching the LPS, and the subsequent arrest of many persons who had protested against the government’s plans, created an atmosphere of fear that deterred most people from opposing the project. The right to demonstrate and the right to assembly were sidelined indefinitely throughout the proposed capital region, so all those who did voice dissent were liable to arrest. By that time, many people, and most landowners, had been coerced into agreement by the swift show of force on
the part of the state government. Those few who still protested were subjected to harassment and intimidation, by police officers and other state officials.

Although for many farmers whether or not to join the LPS was a matter of calculating the benefits of the scheme and comparing it with their income from the farm, that was the case only up to the point when the government began to apply coercive pressure. Later, after years of threats and intimidation, propaganda and manipulation, the question of whether or not to give into the government’s demands became a matter of resilience. Very few people maintained their resistance when faced with the government’s strategies of persuasion—and that was how the government of Andhra Pradesh was able to pool over 30,000 acres of land through a “voluntary” LPS.

As to the second question—“how has the capital-city project affected local people depending on their status”—residents of the affected villages were already spatially and socially divided according to landownership before the project was announced. In general, the class divide correlated with caste composition: members of the upper castes owned most of the land, while Dalits were primarily landless workers. However, with the introduction of the capital-city project, landownership assumed new importance.

Landowners were confronted with a choice. They could comply with the government’s “voluntary” Land Pooling Scheme, and speculate on the possible future profits from the reconstituted plots. Or they could sell the land and buy agricultural land outside the capital region. Or they could resist the scheme and hold on, until either land values went up, or until the government resorted to the Land Acquisition Act (2013), hoping that they would in fact get the provisions stipulated in that legislation. Landowners who could afford to combine these strategies have benefitted enormously from the capital-city project.

Marginal farmers, who constitute the large majority of landowners in the region, felt they had little choice in the matter—less agency—because they owned less land. They were being asked to put all their eggs in one basket, without any real guarantees of benefitting, on a short-term or long-term basis. Therefore, feeling that the speculative venture of the capital-city project was not really designed for them, many marginal landowners resisted the government’s Land Pooling Scheme.

By contrast, landless agricultural workers did not have any choice, or any real agency. They were not asked to join the LPS, and they had no strategies available for improving their socio-economic conditions in that situation—one exception being Dalits who owned assigned lands and tried to transfer it to the government under the LPS. But the fact that most of these
assigned landholders have never received any compensation whatsoever indicates that the
state government does not take the economic and political rights of this class seriously.

For members of the landless communities, it is not just that they did not benefit from the
speculative venture of the capital-city project. They lost their incomes and livelihoods, and
were offered a mere 2,500 rupees a month as compensation. Tens of thousands of people lost
the dignity of work, and found themselves thrown out into the competitive and exploitative
labor market without any training in specialized skills.

Nonetheless, many landless agricultural workers have been lured by projections of “the
good life” cultivated by the state government in the marketing of capital-city project. Their
aspirations for upward mobility, job security, and economic prosperity have become a kind of
“attachment” (Moore 2011). But, as Lauren Berlant argues in Cruel Optimism (2007), dreams
of “the good life” are often unrealistic fantasies that serve as an obstacle. And that applies
equally well to the aspirations of landless people towards (neoliberally defined)
“development” in Andhra Pradesh.

The state government manufactured a situation of heightened uncertainty which
produced profits for the prosperous, but created precarity for the poor. Therefore, I must
conclude that the Amaravati project has served to exacerbate and deepen inequalities along
caste and class lines in the villages of the proposed capital region.
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