



Waiting for displacement: Land, compensation, and spatiotemporal inequality in a mining-affected Indian village

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ABSTRACT

Drawing on ethnographic fieldwork in a village in eastern India's coal-bearing tracts, this paper explores the different ways in which two groups of residents – local, landed households and migrant, landless ones – perceive and respond to the possibility of future mining-induced displacement. It contributes to a growing body of research that is concerned with the anticipatory phase of land dispossession, and the differential ways in which people prepare for, perceive, and respond to its expected future arrival. In particular, the paper illustrates how the prospect of displacement, in conjunction with an associated compensation policy operated by the coal company, gives rise to inequalities in time and space between the two groups, consisting of uneven degrees of uncertainty towards the future; distinct ways of experiencing the time until eviction; and spatial differentiation through labour migration. The paper thereby illuminates some of the more nuanced yet significant qualitative forms of inequality that can arise in contexts of not-yet-happening dispossession.

1. Introduction

In the coal-rich state of Jharkhand, eastern India, mining operations have for decades brought about the expropriation of rural land, and the erosion of traditional land- and forest-based livelihoods. Much has been written about the deleterious effects of mining-induced dispossession and displacement on the region's Adivasi (tribal or indigenous) and Dalit (low-caste) communities, who inhabit much of its mineral-bearing tracts (e.g., Padel and Samarendra, 2010, Fernandes et al., 2007, Fernandes and Mathur, 2008). More recent studies, however, have drawn attention to the diverse, unequal consequences of dispossession and associated compensation schemes not only across but also within mining-affected communities, and the ways in which they can exacerbate or create new local disparities (e.g., Gardner, 2018, Noy, 2020, Noy 2022, Oskarsson, 2018). Furthering this area of inquiry, and drawing on fieldwork in a village I call Karampot,¹ situated next to a state-owned opencast colliery in Jharkhand, this paper seeks to expand our understanding of the differential impact of mechanisms of dispossession, displacement, and compensation. More specifically, it illustrates the ways in which the threat of anticipated *future* displacement gives rise to forms of spatiotemporal inequality between different groups in the present, in connection with their ownership or non-ownership of land.

Ethnographically, the paper examines the disparities that have emerged between two groups of residents in Karampot: autochthonous

households, from the Santal tribe; and a minority of migrant households, who belong to other Adivasi and Dalit populations and are not originally from the village. In what follows – and for want of a better nomenclature – I refer to this latter group collectively as ‘non-Santals’, to distinguish them from the Santal majority in the village. This corresponds to an emic distinction made between the two groups on the basis of their ethnicity and place of origin: Santal villagers generally refer to those from migrant households in Karampot as “outsiders” (*bahria*),² while the latter acknowledge Santals’ undisputed status in the village as the local ‘sons of the soil’.

Faced with a lack of employment options in the colliery and the area more generally, both Santal and non-Santal households have come to primarily depend for their livelihood on peddling coal that they gather, illicitly, from the mine's depot yard. There is, however, one important way in which the two groups differ: while in addition to peddling coal, Santal households own and work small agricultural plots, as migrants non-Santals do not formally possess any land in Karampot – not even that on which their own houses were built. As the paper will show, this distinction places Santals and non-Santals in contrasting positions in relation to the possibility of displacement for mining, which villages believe will sooner or later take place. Each group's position, in turn, shapes how it perceives the prospect of displacement, responds to it, and engages with time as well as space in the indeterminate period until it arrives.

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¹ The names of most places and all persons have been changed.

² While both words translate roughly as ‘outsiders’, it is important to distinguish between *bahria* and *diku*, which has been used by Adivasis to refer to exploitative, higher-caste moneylenders and landowners from outside the region.

Indeed, land in Karampot – for those who have it – not only plays a role in livelihood strategies and in producing a rooted sense of place; perhaps more importantly, it can prove crucial in case of mining-induced displacement. Under the national coal company's compensation policy for so-called 'project affected persons', only those with titled land can benefit from compensation in case of displacement. Such compensation can amount to a permanent (and public sector) mining job, which in India's predominantly informal labour environment – especially for Adivasi and Dalit populations (Lerche and Shah, 2018, Shah et al. 2018, p. 10) – is considered especially valuable (see also Parry, 2019). Drawing on the experience of a nearby, mining-displaced Santal village, and on the local political influence of the Santal-led Jharkhand Mukti Morcha (JMM; Jharkhand Liberation Front) party, Karampot Santals are fairly confident in their ability to obtain such jobs following displacement. The time preceding displacement is therefore marked for them by relatively little anxiety, and even anticipation of a better future and employment security. For non-Santals, on the other hand, who as landless residents would be excluded from any provision of compensatory jobs, displacement would spell unmitigated eviction, which renders their future emphatically insecure. To address this predicament, they seek to increase their earnings through repeated labour migration away from Karampot, leaving family members behind, to be able to invest in acquiring land for themselves elsewhere to achieve a more settled, less precarious future.

By paying attention to differential temporal and spatial experiences in relation to not-yet-happening displacement, and the distinct ways in which people strategize for the future, the paper builds on and expands an emerging body of literature that seeks to illuminate how future change or disruption can produce effects and inequalities in the present (e.g., Cross, 2015, Harms, 2013, Limbert et al., 2008, Weszkalnys, 2014). In particular, a focus on differentiation in time and space – in terms of different degrees of insecurity and uncertainty towards the future, abilities to plan a life, and the stretching out of some people's lives across localities through temporary work migration (Bear, 2016, Rogaly and Thieme, 2012) – allows to uncover more nuanced, qualitative manifestations of inequality in extractive and other contexts of dispossession.

The fieldwork on which this paper draws was carried out over 18 months between 2015 and 2017, during which I was living in Karampot alongside coal-peddling Santal and non-Santal villagers. Research methods included a household survey, covering all 146 households in the village and capturing data on livelihood activities, landholdings, and past and present migration movements; in-depth, semi-structured interviews, and more informal conversations, around issues of land, labour, migration, and displacement³; and participant observation in interlocutors' everyday lives and work in Karampot. A number of individuals, from both Santal and non-Santal households, were consulted regularly and more extensively through home visits and more casual encounters. This close interaction provides much of the data presented and relied on in the paper. It is complemented by broader insights, gained over the period of fieldwork, into the lived realities of people engulfed by mining activities and concomitant dispossession.

Following an outline of the conceptual framing that situates the paper within debates on dispossession, inequality, and temporalities, I lay out the historical context to Karampot and mining operations around it, and trace the arrival in the village of non-Santal, migrant households. I then consider the role of land ownership in Karampot, primarily in relation to assumed future displacement; and, subsequently, discuss the distinct ways in which Santals and non-Santals regard displacement, and experience and act in the time until it occurs.

³ Interviews and conversations took place in Hindi – Jharkhand's lingua franca, of which I have working knowledge – with the help of an Adivasi, Hindi native-speaking research assistant.

2. Dispossession, inequality, and temporalities

A significant body of research on forms of dispossession, displacement, and attendant compensation schemes has examined the highly unequal outcomes of these processes for different groups of residents. In critical urban scholarship, for example, studies of eviction for slum clearance and urban renewal have examined the "differential inclusion" produced by resettlement schemes (Anand and Rademacher 2011, p. 1766, Roy 2009); and, relatedly, the distinct "subjective experiences of displacement and engagement with redevelopment" based on positionalities such as class and gender (Doshi, 2013: 845). In a similar vein, but in more rural contexts, dispossession and compensation measures – in connection with Special Economic Zones (SEZs) in India (Agarwal, 2021, Agarwal and Levien, 2020, Levien 2018) or neoliberal mining enclaves in Zimbabwe (Lesutis, 2019) – have been shown to compound caste and class inequalities between different local communities, and deepen the marginalization of more vulnerable groups.

In parallel, a growing thread of literature has emerged that, as part of a 'temporal turn' (Bear, 2016), focuses on uneven temporal dynamics and experiences in contexts of resource extraction and/or dispossession. Much of this research is concerned in particular with the materialization of these dynamics and experiences in the anticipatory phase *before* a significant event – i.e., prior to the predicted start (or closure) of mining operations, and/or the actual enactment of land dispossession. In extractive settings (see D'Angeloa and Pijpersb, 2018), this is reflected in studies observing concerns and anxieties but also expectations and hopes for the future, which manifest in different ways in people's present daily lives (e.g., Limbert et al., 2008, Luning, 2012, Weszkalnys 2014, Weszkalnys, 2016). Studies of dispossession in relation to a range of land-acquiring projects, for their part, have recently also drawn attention to the period before it takes place, showing how the anticipation of dispossession can shape current experiences, actions, and strategies, and how this varies by socio-economic position (Balakrishnan, 2019, Cross 2015, Levien 2018, Sami 2013).

Together with other work on the temporality of waiting (Jeffrey 2010, Jeffrey and Young, 2012, Carswell et al. 2019), these studies illustrate how waiting – in this case, for disruptive change – is not passive but can be productive and strategic, and differs along lines of caste, class, gender, and ethnicity. In his study of an SEZ in south India, for example, Jamie Cross (2015) discusses how the announcement of such projects can "encourage dreams of profit and improvement among those who are set to be most affected by their construction" (ibid., 426). He goes on to describe how forward-caste and middle-class residents sought to benefit from the coming of the economic zone by "selling off small pockets of land to real estate speculators" or becoming such speculators themselves, buying up and selling on plots next to the zone as hopes about the area's economic prospects sent land prices soaring (ibid., 431). Similarly, Michael Levien (2018) shows how plans for a new SEZ in Rajasthan drew farmers into a process of land speculation, whereby dominant agricultural castes disproportionately became "successful speculators and brokers" (ibid., 129). Many poor, lower-caste villagers, on the other hand, did not have the means and social capital to handle the sale of their land as efficiently, and were left worse off.

An exploration of the anticipatory phase of land-acquiring projects allows us to probe the different ways in which people prepare for and experience not-yet-happening dispossession and/or displacement, as part of a temporality in which large-scale future change "has effects in the present, prior to – or rather in anticipation of – its occurrence" (Weszkalnys, 2014, p. 230). Such an exploration also enables us to measure inequality in new, more nuanced yet important ways (see Bear, 2016), by paying attention to people's differential insecurities, uncertainties, and hopes for the future; abilities to plan for it; and, relatedly, the ways in which their waiting itself is experienced. Particularly useful in this regard is Erik Harms' (2013) study of the 'temporality of eviction' in a zone set for demolition and redevelopment in Ho Chi Minh, Vietnam, where residents were waiting to be evicted at some

point in the future. Focusing on the different ways in which people responded to this seemingly shared predicament, Harms shows how waiting for eviction – particularly over long, indeterminate periods of time – can be alienating for some and empowering for others. Indeed, while some residents experienced this waiting as oppressive, others treated it with relative indifference and even as a source of economic opportunity. This depended on people's livelihood activities – in particular, the extent to which these were mobile or grounded in a "fixed, immovable place" (ibid., p. 361), which allows Harms to insert into his analysis people's engagement with space, and produce an ethnography of spatiotemporal inequality (see also Bear 2016, pp. 494–495) in the period leading up to displacement. The temporality of eviction, Harms concludes, "produces different effects on different people" (2013, p. 347), conditioned by specific structural features such as people's relationships to productive activity.

Drawing on this body of literature on the 'not yet' phase (Weszkalnys, 2014) of dispossession and displacement, this paper explores the distinct ways in which Santals and non-Santals in Karampot experience and respond to the temporal uncertainty of assumed mining-induced eviction. It traces this distinction to Santals' and non-Santals' respective landed and landless status as 'locals' and 'outsiders', which situates each group in a particular position with regard to the compensation mechanism that will be triggered in case of displacement. While this allows Santals to experience the anticipatory period of displacement in a more relaxed, and even hopeful, way, for non-Santals this temporality is much more onerous. These divergent experiences, moreover, allow Santals to feel comfortable staying put in Karampot for the time being, but impel non-Santals to migrate away for wage labour, thereby adding a spatial component to the differentiation between the two groups.

The Karampot case constitutes an important addition to our comparative understating of the varied effects of dispossession and displacement before they occur. This is in particular because of the respects in which it differs from much of the research on these issues, which focuses on private, neoliberal dispossessing projects such as SEZs in contexts of significant pre-existing caste, class, and power inequalities (e.g., Balakrishnan 2019, Cross, 2015, Levien, 2018). The Karampot case diverges from this work in two main ways. First, it offers a comparison of the dynamics of not-yet-happening displacement for two similarly marginalized groups who, consisting of Adivasis and Dalits, belong to communities that are placed at the bottom of the socio-economic hierarchy.⁴ With both Santals and non-Santals relying on informal, precarious labour, there are no noticeable economic disparities between the two groups. The only concrete difference is the ownership or non-ownership of small amounts of (unirrigated) land. This allows homing in on the ways in which marginalized people perceive and strategize around it in relation to assumed future displacement – as a means to obtain a permanent, compensatory job, in the case of Santals, or a more fixed rural life, in that of non-Santals – and the forms of differentiation that arise in the process. Indeed, land is at the centre of both groups' pre-displacement strategies, which demonstrates its continued significance for poor people even when – as part of a broader agrarian crisis (Lerche, 2011, Shah and Harriss-White, 2011) – agriculture can at best provide self-sustenance.

The second way in which the Karampot case differs from other related work concerns the form of compensation involved. Authors such as Balakrishnan (2019), Cross (2015) and Levien (2018) show how people try to capitalize on land speculation and rising land prices as part of the real estate boom generated by the planned arrival of an SEZ. At variance with such a scenario, Karampot residents' hopes and uncertainties revolve around a type of compensation that, as I expand on

⁴ Dalits and Adivasis generally display high rates of poverty and underemployment, and earn their living primarily in the informal economy, in the lowest types of labour (see for example Lerche and Shah, 2018, Shah et al. 2018).

below, is in India virtually exclusive to dispossession for particular public sector enterprises such as mining projects, and is arguably superior to any form of monetary benefit (see also Noy, 2022). This sets the stakes especially high, and helps show how more nuanced inequalities generated in the period of waiting for displacement are tied to, and prefigurative of, more profound inequalities that would emerge in its wake.

Finally, the paper calls attention to an under-explored aspect of the ways in which the anticipation of displacement can shape present actions – namely, its connection to labour migration, which is undertaken by non-Santals in response to their assumed future eviction. Drawing on Ben Rogaly's (2003, Rogaly and Thieme, 2012) work, I regard this migration as a form of inequality in space: in their attempt to mitigate displacement and improve their future, non-Santal residents – unlike Santal ones – are driven to stretch their lives between Karampot and their distant migration sites, which in turn only reinforces their position as impermanent 'outsiders'. Similar to Harms' (2013) study, this element of the analysis inserts a spatial dimension into the discussion of the unequal temporalities of eviction; differently from his work, however, it does so by bringing the issue of work migration into the picture. While Harms illustrates how people's local movements in space can condition their experience of 'eviction time', the Karampot case shows how the anticipation of displacement can condition people's migratory movements, while allowing yet others to stay put.

3. Setting

As a mining-affected village, Karampot is embedded within a long history of coal extraction in central and eastern India, and its interaction with Adivasis and Dalits. Having been first discovered in 1774, the emergence of coal as an industry in the region can be traced to 1850 and the opening of the railway between the region's largest coalfield and industrial Calcutta (Lahiri-Dutt, 2014). Faced with land scarcity and low agricultural productivity, Adivasis and Dalits – from not only the immediate but also surrounding districts – were the first groups to be drawn into the new economic activity of mining, working as cutters, carriers, and loaders (Simeon 1996, Simmons, 1976). In 1973 – and post-independence – coal mining in India was brought under public control.⁵ This led to the gradual closure of the country's many private collieries, and the formation of Coal India Limited (CIL) – India's national mining corporation – which has since dominated domestic coal production.⁶ Like private mining companies before it, CIL has depended on land acquisition for its operations, which has had a disproportionate effect on Adivasis and Dalits, who occupy much of the country's coal-bearing central and eastern states. To facilitate coal production – seen as an essential driver of industrial development – mining has been supported by legal provisions that secure its primacy over all other land uses, and enable the state to effectively acquire any land for the purpose

⁵ Coal's nationalization – and the prospect of public-sector mining employment – led to an influx into the mining areas of more dominant outsider groups, namely caste Hindus who wished (and had the means) to capture profits from the industry (Devalle 1992, p. 97). This paper, however, is concerned with the migration of more marginalized, Adivasi and Dalit groups, who sought wage labour opportunities in mining due to the difficulties of subsistence (through agriculture and/or casual work) at home.

⁶ CIL-operated mines contribute around 83 percent of India's total coal production (<https://archive.coalindia.in/en-us/company/aboutus.aspx>). The remaining percentage comes from privately-owned collieries, following steps taken towards the liberalization of the sector. Private companies, however, are expected to play only a limited role in coal production in the foreseeable future (Rakshit, 2018).

of its extraction (Lahiri-Dutt 2014).⁷ Indeed, since India's independence, and alongside other industrial and infrastructure projects, mining has been one of the main causes of land acquisition, dispossession, and displacement – with Adivasis and Dalits being particularly affected (Fernandes et al., 2007).

Karampot's engagement with mining activities goes back to the 1970s. In that decade, a number of private underground collieries, owned by higher-caste Hindus, were established in the village's vicinity. In need of labour, the new collieries attracted local Santals from Karampot and nearby villages to work as piece-rate coal cutters. Typical of this part of Jharkhand, most Santal households in Karampot had relatively small, unirrigated plots, faced with demographic pressure, that were unable to provide any marketable surplus. To generate income, Santals therefore had to seek wage labour opportunities in the informal economy surrounding the village, which the private mines were able to offer. The mines, moreover – as had previously been the case in the industry – also attracted other Adivasi and Dalit labourers in search of work from adjoining districts. Some of these labourers, as I relate below, eventually settled in Karampot, building their homes on patches of vacant, deedless or common land (*gair majurwa*) – not officially recorded and without legal ownership.

While, following nationalization, private mining operations around Karampot eventually had to cease,⁸ the disused underground pits remained largely accessible. Taking advantage of this, villagers began descending into the abandoned shafts and cut coal with the intention of selling it themselves. Coal is, in rural Jharkhand, in high demand as a cooking fuel; villagers would pack it in large jute or woven plastic sacks, attach these to a bicycle, and push it to the main road to sell the coal to households, teashops, roadside restaurants, and informal petty coal brokers.

A few years later, in 1982, a new, state-owned open-cut colliery known as Pandu Project – managed by a regional subsidiary of CIL – was constructed just over 1.5 km from the village. To make room for it, the state government had acquired large tracts of land around Karampot, including not only grazing and forest land but also the entire territory of a neighbouring Santal hamlet by the name of Dharutar, which in 2010 would be displaced for the excavation of a new opencast pit. While employment opportunities in the new project were scarce – especially for mostly unskilled local groups such as Adivasis (see also Lahiri-Dutt 1999, Levien 2013, p. 375) – it presented villagers with a comparatively simpler way to source coal for peddling. Instead of having to cut it from the depths of old, depleting underground shafts, villagers could now obtain coal from Pandu Project's often unguarded depot yard, where extracted coal was regularly piled in large mounds. Coal peddling has since then become the most ubiquitous way to earn a living in Karampot:

⁷ The 1894 Land Acquisition Act (LAA), which allowed for the expropriation of land for any industrial or infrastructure project serving a 'public purpose', for decades provided mining projects with practically unlimited access to village lands on the grounds of industrial development (Corbridge and Robb, 1993, p. 133, George, 2014, pp. 41–43). The 1957 Coal Bearing Areas (Acquisition & Development) Act (CBAA), moreover – still in force today – similarly gives the state the power to seize any property if extractable coal is found beneath it (Lahiri-Dutt, 2014). When, following political pressure, the LAA was in 2013 repealed in favour of The Right to Fair Compensation and Transparency in Land Acquisition, Rehabilitation and Resettlement Act (known as LAAR), the CBAA was exempt from its application (George, 2014, pp. 44–45, Srivastav and Singh, 2022). Longstanding protective legislation such as the Chotanagpur Tenancy Act (1908) and the Santhal Parganas Tenancy Act (1949), which are meant to protect Adivasi land by prohibiting its transfer to non-Adivasis, likewise do not prevent the acquisition of Adivasi land for 'public purposes' including coal production.

⁸ The process of nationalization occurred not in one sweep but over a number of years. During this period, it was explained to me, small private mines such as around Karampot were able to initially continue operating under the radar, typically through informal arrangements with local politicians and officials.

compared to 'wage hunting and gathering' (Breman, 1994) through casual work outside the village, peddling coal is considered not only a more accessible means of livelihood but also, by local standards, the more profitable one.

Coal peddling is carried out by Karampot's Santal and non-Santal, migrant inhabitants alike.⁹ Of the village's 146 households, 115 (or 79%) are made up by the former, who are the descendants of Karampot's original Santal settlers, four generations ago. The other 31 households (or 21%) are occupied by those other Adivasi and low-caste families who had initially relocated to Karampot to work in the private mines, as illustrated by the story of brothers Sukhram and Birsa.

3.1. Coal migration

Both in their early 40s and from a Dalit caste, Sukhram and Birsa arrived in Karampot with their parents as young children in the 1970s. Like many others, the brothers' parents had left their native village in an adjoining district and travelled to Karampot to seek work as wage labourers in the nearby private mines, where they subsequently spent several years cutting coal underground while residing in a *jhopri* (makeshift) hut. After the mines' closure as part of the industry's nationalization, Sukhram and Birsa's parents eventually returned to their home village, where they still had a patch of land to till that they did not wish to forsake. Sukhram and Birsa, on the other hand – who were, respectively, 17 and 20 years old at the time – decided to stay on in Karampot. There was no work back in their native village, only a shrinking family plot that was unlikely to suffice for sustaining their own future households. Karampot, by comparison, had the advantage of offering access to coal for peddling – first from the discontinued underground shafts and soon after from Pandu Project's depot – which overall seemed like a better option. The family's *jhopri* hut was consequently replaced with a more durable mud structure, erected in an area of common land that did not formally belong to any of the local Santal households.

Sukhram and Birsa's story is characteristic of Karampot's non-Santal households, who are concentrated in three small clusters of houses in the village. Many have over the years developed friendly relations with local Santal residents; because they are not Santal themselves and not originally from Karampot, however, they are still regarded by Santals as *bahria* – 'from outside'. What is nonetheless shared by the two groups is not only the peddling of coal as a form of work but also the threat of displacement from Karampot. As palpably indicated by the smoke that can sometimes be seen emanating from the cracks in the ground – a result of underground seam fires – there is still coal lying underneath the village's soil. Well aware of the fate of adjacent Dharutar, which in 2010 was evicted for Pandu Project's expansion, both Santal and non-Santal residents assume that Karampot too, in the nearer or more distant future, will ultimately be submerged by the company's growing extractive operations, and displaced.¹⁰ As I discuss next, however, the fact that, as migrants, non-Santal residents do not own any land in Karampot – neither for farming nor that on which their own houses stand – entrenches them in a veritably precarious position in relation to the possibility of eviction compared to their landed Santal neighbours.

4. Dispossession, compensation, and planning for the future

On the surface, the difference between landedness and landlessness in Karampot might not appear especially significant. For nearly all Santal households, land fragmentation over generations has resulted in marginal to small landholdings of around two acres that, combined with the lack of irrigation and dependence on rainfall, makes it impossible to

⁹ For a more detailed discussion of this economic activity, see Noy, 2023.

¹⁰ While displacement in Karampot is, at present, not a foregone conclusion, it is what villagers anticipate will eventually happen.

engage in any agricultural activity other than small-scale subsistence farming. Santal villagers normally work on their fields only a few weeks a year – during the sowing, transplanting, and harvesting season – and rely primarily on coal peddling for their income. Local notions about agrarian decline – driven by not only dwindling plot sizes but also water, air, and soil pollution from the mine¹¹ – are common, and farming accordingly plays only a limited role in Santals' overall livelihood strategies. Younger Santals in particular are often disinclined to take part in agriculture, and prefer to focus their efforts on peddling coal and earning cash. This situation chimes in with a broader narrative of agrarian crisis in India and other parts of the global South, where agriculture can no longer provide an adequate livelihood base, and rural people increasingly depend on other, insecure forms of work for their social reproduction (Rigg, 2006, Shah and Harriss-White, 2011, Shah et al. 2018, p. 12).

Closer scrutiny, however, reveals that land ownership in Karampot nevertheless carries importance in other, perhaps less obvious ways. First, while the cultivation carried out by Santals does not generate any surplus, it does provide them with much of their basic subsistence needs, which in turn means that a larger share of coal peddling income can be directed towards other purposes, including modest saving. I know Santal villagers, for example, who have used money saved from peddling coal over months and years to replace their mud hut with a sturdier, rudimentary brick (*pukka*) structure, or send their children to the small private school across the road from Karampot instead of the public – and allegedly inferior – government school at the entrance to the village. Landless non-Santals, by contrast, rely exclusively on their (non-agricultural) labour and cash earnings for subsistence, which makes it more difficult for them to generate any savings from peddling coal – a point that will become especially significant in the discussion on migration below.

Second, despite its diminishing role in livelihood strategies, land is still regarded as an anchor of rural life – which, for Santals, is related to a sense of rootedness in place. In their study of rural–urban labour migration in Cambodia, Natarajan et al. (2018) ask why former small-holder farmers who, given the challenges of agrarian production, work as brick kiln labourers wish to remain tied and eventually return to land-based livelihoods. They find that for these labourers, brick kiln work is perceived as transitory, as opposed to the “apparent fixedness of rural life”, which is “more rooted as a place of home” (ibid., pp. 1582–1583).¹² Similarly, land is what roots Santals in Karampot: it marks their link to the ancestors who had cleared the forest and established the village, and – compared to the village's migrant, non-Santal population – asserts their status in it as autochthonous residents. This status comes with certain informal privileges. It is locally accepted, for example, that Santals have unrestricted access to forest resources in Karampot, where they forage mushrooms and pick *mahua* flowers that Santal women distil to prepare an alcoholic drink by the same name. Non-Santal women, on the other hand, buy *mahua* flowers for the same purpose from the weekly market by the nearby highway. As one of them explained, “The *mahua* trees here belong to Santals; we can't just go and pluck the flowers from them”. There is an overall sense among non-Santals that Karampot is, ultimately, Santal territory, where their access to particular local resources is more restricted.

Moreover, land is also thought of as a more fixed, lasting asset compared to the inherent precarity and temporal uncertainty of

peddling coal. Pushing the heavy, coal-loaded bicycles, for one, is backbreaking, and takes a cumulative toll on the body. Indeed, many older coal peddlers develop chronic pains that ultimately force them to retire from this activity and rely on income from coal peddled by their sons. Gathering coal for peddling from the mine's depot is, in addition, formally illegal. CIL, for the time being, mostly turns a blind eye to this activity. Similar to the way in which extractive companies' Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) programmes serve as an instrument “to respond to and occasionally forestall disquiet” by locals as a result of frustrated hopes or expectations of mining employment (Kale 2020, p. 1216), tolerating villagers' pilfering of coal can be viewed as a way to mitigate the risk of protest and confrontation. The threat of coal peddling being clamped down on, however, still lurks, and villagers' access to coal as a means of livelihood is fundamentally insecure. While peddling coal might be a *relatively* stable source of income for villagers at present, then, it is also imbued with uncertainty that at some point in the future could leave them or their children shorn of their only means of livelihood, with no viable alternatives. This points to the significance of land as a long-term prophylactic against destitution. “You can't eat coal”,¹³ villagers often told me; having land, however, ensures “you will at least have some food to survive”, and represents a basic level of self-sufficiency. Indeed, despite the fact that their income is generated through peddling coal, when asked what they do for a living most of my Santal interlocutors replied intuitively with “farming”, which alludes to the central role that land still plays in their lives as a relative constant.

This ostensible fixedness of land, of course, would appear to be at variance with its susceptibility, in Karampot and the area, to expropriation for mining. Yet it is precisely in this context that, paradoxically, land has taken on new crucial substance, intertwined with CIL's compensation policy for those dispossessed for mining. Differently from SEZs (Cross, 2015, Levien, 2018), mining in India does not generally generate a real estate bubble of land speculation. The mining industry has, from the outset, operated as an enclave geared mostly towards the needs of India's industrial and metropolitan centres, and has done little to contribute to the economic development of the surrounding countryside (Devalle 1992, pp. 82–87, Rothermund et al., 1978). What it produces is mostly for the use of other heavy public sector industries; unlike SEZs, it certainly does not bear the shiny aura of the knowledge economy and information technology, or is associated with middle-class consumption or high-end services (Levien, 2018, p. 90, p. 100). As such, and without offering any tax or tariff exemptions for investors, public sector mining projects are unlikely to engender the same kind of dreams of investment and a global India (Kaur, 2020), or serve as a pull factor for expensive real estate. What they do offer, however, is the possibility of formal employment for dispossessed land.

Unlike many other types of land-acquiring projects, which may offer different forms of material compensation for dispossession (Levien, 2018, Misra, 2019), casual work opportunities (Gardner, 2018), subsidized housing (Cross, 2015), and/or Corporate Social Responsibility programmes (Gardner et al., 2012), land expropriation for public sector mining in India has been accompanied by a policy of providing regular employment to villagers who lose a certain amount of it. Rooted in India's developmentalist, Nehruvian era of public sector industrialization, which focused on not only growth but also employment generation (Fernandes et al., 2007, Parry, 2003),¹⁴ this policy is currently set at one

¹¹ In this, villagers might not be wrong: mining has been shown to result in land degradation and have an adverse impact on agricultural productivity (Mishra, 2014).

¹² Similar to Sippel and Visser (2021), and in light of discussions about land's unfixed nature (e.g., Sud, 2019), I do not regard fixity “as an absolute feature of land” (Sippel and Visser, 2021, p. 275). However, when situated on a continuum, relative to other resources, and certainly for my interlocutors, “land tends to have more fixity” (ibid.).

¹³ A similar statement was made by Develeena Ghosh's (2016) interlocutors in her study of an Adivasi community facing the takeover of their land for mining in Chhattisgarh.

¹⁴ The state-owned Bhilai Steel Plant, for instance, which was constructed during the same period, also included the promise of compensatory jobs as part of its compensation package for requisitioned land (Parry, 2013).

colliery job for every two acres of dispossessed land, for which eligible 'land losers' in principle qualify.¹⁵

As public sector jobs, the value of CIL employment positions cannot be overstated in relation to virtually any other conceivable form of compensation for dispossession. While approximately 92% of India's workforce earn their livelihoods in the informal economy, only 8% have formal, permanent employment (National Commission for Enterprises in the Unorganised Sector, 2009, Lerche and Shah 2018, pp. 934–935). This distinction, Jonathan Parry (2013, Parry 2019) has asserted – between those engaged in precarious, low-paid work and those with remunerative salaries and economic security – constitutes the most salient divide within India's labouring classes. What is more, when it comes to formal employment, it is public sector jobs – of the kind that CIL provides – that are widely considered the most lucrative and secure, and serve as a key determinant of social class mobility in the Weberian sense of lifestyle and life chances (ibid.). Such jobs, in short, are a sought-after but extremely rare commodity. In case of dispossession, this makes access to CIL's compensation policy particularly crucial, and can play a central role in muting local protest against public sector mining (Noy, 2022).

The actual implementation of the compensation policy, nonetheless, can vary significantly between sites. Since India's economic liberalization in the 1990s, and in an attempt to downsize the workforce and increase economic efficiency (Fernandes et al., 2007), CIL has been encouraging its subsidiaries to offer 'land losers' the option of increased monetary compensation in lieu of employment (Business Standard, 2013, Hindu Business Line, 2018). The distribution of compensatory jobs, as I have discussed in more detail elsewhere (Noy, 2022), thus hinges to a significant extent on the form and degree of political pressure and negotiation applied by local political leaders. The adjacent, now displaced village of Dharutar, in this regard, represents a relative success, which is closely linked to the local dominance and influence of the Santal-founded and -led JMM party. Taking inspiration from the 1855 Santal rebellion against the British Raj, the JMM in the 1970s and 1980s had spearheaded a militant grassroots struggle against outside incursions on Adivasi land and resources, and for the establishment of an autonomous Jharkhand – then part of the state of Bihar – which eventually took place in 2000. The JMM has remained a salient political entity in Jharkhand and, in the mostly Santal area of Karampot, enjoys especially high levels of support. Importantly, and owing to its notorious history of political mobilization, it also holds a degree of leverage in its interaction with local CIL projects. Using the threat of local protest and disruption to coal production, which mining projects strive to avoid, Santal JMM political workers and *netas* (leaders) were able to negotiate and broker the provision of jobs in the project to eligible Dharutar displacees. This, importantly, also included the complicated task of locating and obtaining for villagers the required land title documents from the block¹⁶ and district offices, which are necessary for claiming compensatory employment from CIL. In total, among the 67 Santal households that in 2010 had been evicted from the village, 62 compensatory jobs were distributed between 2012 and 2014, mostly one per household.

¹⁵ While the aforementioned LAAR sets guidelines for granting compensation for land acquisition – including compensatory employment – as federal legislation it is very broad and, importantly, does not apply in mining areas. Even in non-mining areas, the LAAR seems to be patchily implemented, with state governments often diluting key provisions (Chandran, 2017, Economic Times, 2018). The type of compensation provided (if any) therefore seems to depend considerably on the project in question and local political pressure by affected communities. CIL and other public-sector industries are here unique in the inclusion of compensatory jobs in their own compensation policies, which differs from at least the majority of land-acquiring private-sector companies (see also Noy, 2022).

¹⁶ The most local unit of district administration.

Most displaced villagers were hired as assistants in Pandu Project's machinery workshop, in the lowest rung of CIL's employment hierarchy. Nevertheless, as permanent public sector employees they enjoy the critical benefit of job security, "which is to say a relatively predictable future" (Parry, 2019, p. 65) – incomparably more so than that of those peddling coal or engaged in any other kind of informal work. This is accompanied by generous wage packages – on par with middle-class income in a typical Indian town – that enable Santal employees to construct large concrete houses; purchase motorbikes; send their children to more reputable, costlier private schools and colleges; and generally pursue middle-class aspirations, increasingly prevalent among younger-generation Adivasi villagers (see also Higham and Shah, 2013).

Displacement for mining in Karampot would similarly entitle 'land losers' to CIL jobs and the substantial benefits that come with these. With the support and intervention of local Santal JMM *netas*, and as happened only recently with the majority of Dharutar displacees, most of my Santal interlocutors believe that in the event of eviction such jobs would indeed come their way. In fact, losing land is viewed by them as practically the only feasible route to obtaining gainful, formal employment. In spite of existing affirmative action measures for Adivasis, gaining a CIL job through the standard application procedure – or any other public sector post, for that matter – does not seem to most local Santals like an option.¹⁷ Access to such jobs not only requires educational and/or professional credentials that they mostly lack but is also, it is widely believed, contingent on connections and bribery (see also Parry, 2019, pp. 163–227). Land, under these circumstances, has been charged with new, potential value as a resource that could – if and when expropriated by CIL – allow Santal villagers to enter the exclusive, privileged ranks of the securely employed.

Take, for example, Janki, who belongs to one of Karampot's earliest lineages and whose landholdings in the village, while not extensive, are larger than those of most other Santal households. At present, my interlocutors pointed out, Janki's land does not translate into any form of income: like other farming plots in Karampot, it is not sizeable enough to produce agricultural surplus and therefore does not generate any earnings. Yet when mining reaches the village, they said, Janki's land will prove highly advantageous, with its dispossession likely to result in not one but perhaps two or even three compensatory jobs for his household. While on the one hand, then, land is valued as a source of stability – especially vis-à-vis the precarity of peddling coal – the prospect and desirability of high-wage regular jobs complicate the picture. Although the spectre of displacement casts a major shadow over the seeming fixedness of land and rural life, it also – via CIL's compensation policy – introduces the future possibility of gaining a different kind of fixedness, namely that of permanent employment and long-term security.

Most households, it should be noted, can hope to gain a single compensatory job, which is normally awarded to the father (as the assumed 'head of household') or eldest son. This means that not all household members benefit equally from the provision of employment positions, which can give rise to new intra-household and -family inequalities (Noy, 2020; see also Dhagamwar et al., 2003, pp. 122–131). At the same time, however, as I know from former Dharutar households, there is often a perceived sense of moral responsibility by the job holder to support other household and/or close family members in different ways (Noy, 2020). Several CIL-employed Santals originally from Dharutar, for example, live in joint households that include – apart from themselves, their wives, and children – their younger, non-employed siblings and their own nuclear families. In these households, it is the

¹⁷ Despite India's reservation system, which sets a fixed quota of vacancies in public-sector employment for historically disadvantaged groups such as Adivasis, access to such employment among most rural Adivasis in the fieldwork area has remained limited. The common view, not necessarily unfounded, is that the majority of reserved posts end up within a relatively narrow echelon of better-connected, higher-class Adivasis (see also Heuzé, 1996, p. 247).

employed brother who provides for the sustenance of the household as a whole. This is often accompanied by occasional, additional forms of financial support by the employed brother to his siblings – for instance, to fund a wedding or pay the private school fees for their children (Noy, 2020). Even for those who do not obtain jobs themselves, in other words, being in their orbit via an employed sibling can still be advantageous – certainly compared to households with no employment whatsoever.

All these potential benefits, of course, do not apply to non-Santals, whose lack of own land in Karampot not only signifies their status as ‘outsiders’ but also, in case of displacement, excludes them a priori from the provision of any compensatory employment positions. As a result, while both Santals and non-Santals envisage their eventual eviction, they perceive it and experience the time until its arrival in different ways. For Santals, assumed future displacement conjures up simultaneously both concern and aspirations: on the one hand, apprehension about a denuded village landscape, with mining quarries and dump trucks where forest, farmland, and houses used to be; but at the same time, hopes of a public sector job, lifelong employment security, and class mobility. For many, the latter not only mitigates but in fact outweighs for former. Consequently, they are not only waiting for displacement but also hoping for it, as a path towards upward mobility and a more middle-class life. The temporality of future eviction is for most Santals therefore generally free from noticeable anxiety: drawing on their autochthonous status as landowners,¹⁸ the recent job distribution for dispossessed land in Dharutar, and the local clout and experience of the JMM, they believe that they too will be able to gain compensatory employment in the wake of displacement. To protect their chances of doing so, they seek to keep favour with the local Santal JMM political worker, who was himself involved in the facilitation of jobs for Dharutar displacees. As part of this, Santal villagers I know occasionally make themselves available to work on his vegetable patch, for example, or attend the public gatherings he organises – often, as they shared with me, without a real idea of what these are about.

Overall, Santals’ attitude towards future displacement is characterized by a considerable relative lack of worry. “We might have to leave, but we’ll have jobs”, one Santal interlocutor in his late twenties told me casually, echoing the apparent insouciance with which many other Santal informants regard the possibility of eviction. This allows them to continue carrying out their routine of peddling coal and farming (in the monsoonal season) combined with significant daily intervals of hanging out and ‘timepassing’ (Jeffrey, 2010) – a word they use often – spent pottering about with friends, playing cards in the outdoor spaces of their homes or under a tree, fishing in the nearby pond, or hunting birds and picking mushrooms in the forest. For Karampot’s non-Santal households, conversely, eviction is associated not with opportunity but with a profoundly insecure, unknown future, with no prospect of employment, and evokes a sense of finality. “In some years”, a non-Santal interlocutor remarked while pointing at the cluster of houses next to his, “mining will come and take all this away, and we’ll be left with nothing”. My non-Santal informants consequently feel impelled to try to secure a landed future for themselves and their children elsewhere – and, to afford this, seek to supplement their earnings through stretches of temporary labour migration outside of Karampot.

4.1. Labour outmigration and agrarian futures

One important manifestation of Santals’ and non-Santals’ contrasting positionalities around, and perceptions of, future displacement lies in the way in which they lead to differential migration practices and frequencies. While Adivasis from central and eastern India generally

make up a disproportionate – and, alongside Dalits, substantial – portion of the country’s swathes of internal migrant labourers (Shah and Harriss-White, 2011, p. 15, Shah et al., 2018, p. 21), among Karampot’s Santal population migration is not a widespread phenomenon. At variance with findings from other Adivasi villages in Jharkhand, for instance, where one-third to one-half of households had at least one migrating member (Dayal and Karan, 2003, Shah, 2006), I know of only a dozen Santal households in Karampot with members who in recent years have spent significant periods of time working outside the village. These moderate migration figures are attributed by my Santal interlocutors to the local availability of coal for peddling, which at present – and as informal livelihoods go – constitutes for Karampot villagers a relatively steady means of earning an income. Those Santals who do migrate are mostly in their late teens and early twenties, and travel away from Karampot to spend a few months working in construction in large cities such as Hyderabad and Bangalore. Contrary to how labour migration has most often been portrayed (e.g., Breman, 1985, Breman, 1994, Breman, 1996, Mosse et al. 2002, Shah et al., 1990), Santal youngsters’ is not prompted by dire economic need. Rather, it is motivated primarily by the wish to explore new areas, roam around, and gather experiences beyond the confines of village life,¹⁹ harboured by young men who seek a break from the sometimes-humdrum drudgery of peddling coal. Most Santals, though – especially those with families of their own – prefer to stay put and earn their living in Karampot, for labour migration, while adventurously exciting for some, is also seen as hard, risky, and straining (see also Mosse et al., 2002, p. 82, Rogaly, 2003, p. 625, Rogaly and Thieme, 2012), and entails leaving spouses and children behind.

Among non-Santals, on the other hand, the situation is considerably different: temporary labour migration is much more prevalent, with members from nearly half of households engaging in it with varying regularities. While for non-Santals too, the desire to travel away and discover new places can play a role in the decision to migrate, labour migration is in their case ultimately linked to their more precarious circumstances in Karampot, both present and future. As already mentioned, without any land to cultivate, coal peddling is non-Santals’ only source of day-to-day household sustenance, which in turn renders more limited their ability to save from this economic activity. Temporary labour migration, in this context, enables non-Santal households to increase their earnings and achieve modest levels of saving. Savings from migratory labour are put aside, in part, to pursue wishes similar to those found among coal-peddling Santals: *pukka* housing, better schooling, and/or consumption goods such as mobile phones. As Sukhram and Birsa’s case demonstrates, however, such savings are also used for a distinct purpose: an attempt to secure, in the face of anticipated eviction, a future agrarian existence outside of Karampot.

Both Sukhram and Birsa have, over the past years, spent several periods of months at a time working in construction and road paving at a Border Security Force (BSF)²⁰ camp in Rajasthan, over 1,500 km from Jharkhand by train. The two brothers had first arrived in the camp together with the former’s cousin, who had previously worked for a labour contractor from the area. The next time they went, they brought with them a few of their non-Santal neighbours from Karampot. Other non-Santals from the village have since followed suit and become involved in this form of migratory labour, spending time in the same BSF camp. Work in the camp allows Sukhram and Birsa a period, albeit temporary, of relatively regular waged work, which complements their

¹⁹ In her study of another Adivasi village in the state, Shah (2006) has identified similar motivations for migrating.

²⁰ India’s border defence organization.

¹⁸ Indeed, rather than turning to their Adivasi identity more generally to leverage their rights (see Oskarsson and Sareen, 2020), Karampot Santals turn more specifically to their autochthonous Santal identity to claim employment in case of dispossession.

local coal peddling earnings in Karampot.²¹ While peddling coal is considered a better livelihood option than any form of work in and around Sukhram and Birsa's native village, it is still, as discussed above, an inherently precarious as well as illicit activity. "Sometimes you can get more coal", Sukhram said, "and sometimes less, depending on how long the security guards are away for from the depot; sometimes a few cycle loads, sometimes only one or none at all ... Even if everything goes well, you earn daily and spend daily, and it's difficult to save any money at all". This is precisely what spells of migratory labour in Rajasthan enable Sukhram and his brother to do, by carrying out work that, while informal and insecure, provides a monthly wage that is higher than what they usually make peddling coal.

Non-Santals' exclusion from CIL's compensation policy in case of displacement, and the resultant, profound sense of precarity that underpins their lives in Karampot, have led Sukhram and Birsa to invest their savings from migratory labour in a joint attempt to attain land – and a somewhat more settled future – for themselves elsewhere.²² More specifically, the brothers have been pursuing an agricultural plot in bordering Koderma district – some 120 km north of Karampot and away from the mining tracts – where, they had heard through relatives, patches of forest land were being offered by the government to certain Dalit and Adivasi communities. Saved from their work in the BSF camp, Sukhram and Birsa have already spent around 30,000 rupees (roughly US\$300 at the time of fieldwork) in payments – both formal and informal – to different block and district officers in Koderma to initiate the long process of land titling, and produce the litany of official documents, certificates, and signatures required. If everything goes to plan, they envisage keeping a base in Karampot, for the time being, where they could continue peddling coal for as long as would be possible; and, in parallel, constructing a small *pukka* house and starting to till the soil in Koderma, on a parcel of land that would be rightfully their own. Commenting on their efforts to obtain it, Sukhram said:

If mining comes here and we have to leave, with no coal to peddle and no jobs as compensation, what will we do and where will we go? Where will our children build a house later on, and how will they have food to survive? Whatever happens, if you have your own land, you can at least be sure you'll have somewhere to stay, and some rice to fill your stomach.

Faced with the prospect of uncompensated displacement from Karampot, and heightened future uncertainty, Sukhram and Birsa's endeavours to acquire land are based on a conception of land ownership as an anchor of greater security and self-reliance – in terms of both subsistence, through farming; and residence, through authorized occupancy. This notion resonates with views of own-account cultivation by rural people that go beyond economic considerations, as a form and expression of autonomy (Ramamurthy, 2011). In particular, similar to the Cambodian brick kiln labourers from Natarajan et al.'s (2018) study, a future agrarian life – despite the many difficulties of agricultural work – allows Sukhram and Birsa to imagine an alternative, more fixed spatial and temporal reality. Through the saving it facilitates, labour migration from Karampot is a means to pursue this future reality – or at least sustain its imaginary.

It also results, however, in the stretching out (Rogaly, 2003, Rogaly

²¹ While Sukhram and Birsa are in Rajasthan, their wives, who stay in Karampot with the families' young children, are in fact able to continue generating income from coal on their own. Like other non-Santal women in the village whose husbands (or brothers) are away for work, the two wives gather coal from the depot yard and sell it directly to two cycle pushers from another village who come to Karampot to collect it from them.

²² In their work on Adivasi livelihoods in western India, Mosse et al. (2002, 2005) have similarly shown how migrant labour earnings are used for investment in land and the (re)production of subsistence agriculture, which challenges common views of migration as an index of depeasantisation.

and Thieme, 2012) of Sukhram and Birsa's lives, at present, across not only time but also space, as their everyday existence in Karampot is interspersed by prolonged periods spent in the BSF camp in Rajasthan, to which they undertake lengthy, multi-day journeys across states. Compared to the mostly non-migrating Santals, these migratory movements out of and back to Karampot result for Sukhram, Birsa, and other non-Santals in a fragmented spatiotemporal experience, and further cement their status as non-permanent 'outsiders'. The imagining of future stability through acquiring land can therefore be interpreted as a way for them to deal with, and endure, not only the uncertainty generated by assumed displacement but also their current, stretched-out pattern of temporary migration. Although not prompted, like in many cases, by pressing economic hardship, this migration is closely bound up, for villagers like Sukhram and Birsa, with the perceived need to gain a degree of longer-term security in the wake of eviction, and is therefore not as elective as for those (considerably fewer) Santals who choose to labour-migrate. Indeed, among non-Santals, migration is seen as much more of a *necessity*, emerging through the prospect of future displacement and the resultant, enhanced state of uncertainty. Whereas Santals' situation in Karampot allows them to stay put, then, non-Santals feel compelled to utilize the time until displacement to undertake labour migration across national space as a necessary 'cost' (see also Buckley et al., 2017) of trying to establish a landed future post-eviction.

5. Conclusion

A large body of work has examined the unequal outcomes generated by processes of dispossession and attendant compensation mechanisms (e.g., Agarwal and Levien, 2020, Anand and Rademacher, 2011, Gardner, 2018, Lesutis, 2019). A growing strand of research has, in parallel, called attention to the period preceding dispossession and/or displacement (e.g., Balakrishnan, 2019, Cross 2015, Levien, 2018, Sami, 2013). This research has shown how the anticipation of these processes – in conjunction with local forms of stratification along lines such as caste and class – can have uneven effects in the present that are asynchronous with their actual enactment or aftermath, and give rise to different kinds of strategising around compensation policies and/or other potential benefits.

This paper contributes to this scholarship and the comparative understanding of the anticipatory phase of dispossession by illuminating its manifestation and impact in an underexamined context. First, unlike in most studies, the Karampot case is one of relatively muted pre-existing disparities, which allows to understand how the dynamics of not-yet-happening dispossession and compensation produce new inequalities *within* a marginalized population. Moreover, that these inequalities – and related strategies in response to future displacement – are tied to marginal land ownership or non-ownership indicates the continued relevance of land for poor people even at a time of agrarian decline. Second, the Karampot case diverges from the recent focus, in the Indian context, on neoliberal projects and monetary forms of compensation and/or gains from dispossession, such as land speculation. The paper explores instead the anticipatory period of dispossession for a public sector industry – and, relatedly, jobs as an especially valuable form of compensation. Furthermore, the paper adds to the analysis an understudied dimension: the links between anticipating dispossession and labour migration, and the ways in which the uncertainty created by future displacement can lead *some* residents (but not others) to undertake it.

Based on long-term ethnographic fieldwork in Karampot, the paper has considered the differential ways in which anticipating displacement affects and is responded to by Santals and non-Santals based on their positionalities in relation to land and CIL's compensation policy. For Santals, this involves drawing on the local politics of dispossession – more specifically, the JMM's engagement around the distribution of compensatory jobs; for non-Santals, on the other hand, it entails resorting to labour migration in an attempt to construct a rural future for

themselves outside of Karampot. In particular, building on Harms' (2013) work on the temporality of eviction, the paper has illustrated how prospective displacement and compensation can engender distinct experiences in and of time and space. It has shown how each group's positionality frames for it the meaning of future displacement, and its orientation to the period until displacement arrives. For Santals, displacement represents not only an end but also a conduit to a coveted, compensatory public sector job, salaried livelihood security, and upward mobility. Their attitude towards the temporality of eviction is therefore more relaxed, and enables them to carry on their usual routine of coal peddling and timepassing in Karampot. For non-Santals such as Sukhram and Birsa, however, waiting for displacement is notably more oppressive: leading towards unalleviated eviction and an emphatically uncertain future, it generates heightened, more-than-economic precarity that results in labour migration that stretches out their lives across national space.

Turning attention to such spatiotemporal forms of differentiation allows to expand the study of inequality in contexts of dispossession by uncovering less obvious, qualitative dimensions of it (see also Bear, 2016, D'Angeloa and Pijpersb, 2018, 220). Given the prevalence of land dispossession as a global phenomenon (e.g., Borras and Franco, 2012, Hall 2013), the paper's findings should therefore be of interest to scholars concerned with not only India but also other places where dispossession interacts with local marginalized communities – not only during and after but also before its arrival.

CRedit authorship contribution statement

Itay Noy: Conceptualization, Methodology, Investigation, Data curation, Writing – original draft, Writing – review & editing, Project administration, Funding acquisition.

Declaration of Competing Interest

The authors declare that they have no known competing financial interests or personal relationships that could have appeared to influence the work reported in this paper.

Data availability

The data that has been used is confidential.

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