

## **India's Double-Movement: Polanyi and the National Alliance of People's Movements**

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### **Abstract**

*Through an examination of India's National Alliance of People's Movements (NAPM), the largest social movement alliance resisting neoliberal globalization in India, this paper attempts to theoretically reconstruct Polanyi's theory of "the double movement" for the neoliberal age. Polanyi famously observed that early twentieth century liberal attempts to "dis-embed" the market from social controls created unprecedented social dislocations, leading to widespread protective "countermovements" to "re-embed" the market within social constraints. I analyze the usefulness and shortcomings of Polanyi's formulation for understanding the current politics of neoliberal globalization. Specifically, I argue that Polanyi failed to explain how a "countermovement" is politically organized and did not develop an adequate theory for the anti-market countermovement he described. Using ethnographic observation of NAPM's efforts to organize a national alliance against neoliberal globalization, I show how the nature of a "Polanyian" constituency creates previously untheorized obstacles for the effective political organization of a countermovement. These obstacles derive from inherent characteristics of a Polanyian constituency: 1) the economic and social diversity of—and therefore potential antagonism between—its prospective agents, who do not share similar relationships to the means of production, but only the common fact of being negatively affected by the market, and 2) the vastly different ways in which such diverse groups experience market displacements, leading to a proliferation of single-issue movements whose commonality is hard to perceive and unity difficult to build.*

### **Introduction**

In May 2004, in a small village in a dusty corner of Andhra Pradesh, a meeting took place in at least six languages. Under the banner of the National Alliance of People's Movements (NAPM), movements from across India had gathered with the purpose of giving greater coherence to their struggles against neoliberal globalization. Anti-Coca Cola activists from Uttar Pradesh, landless laborers' unions from Andhra

Pradesh, anti-dam activists from the Narmada Valley, fisherpeople from Kerala, a peasant-worker movement from Rajasthan, and a women's movement from Tamil Nadu worked out strategic and ideological positions through simultaneous translations in Hindi, Marathi, Telugu, Malayalam, Gujarati and Tamil. Dalit (lower caste) movements, informal laborers' unions, forest rights movements, movements organized against industrial pollution, and many others swelled the hot, overflowing room. One could only wonder how these seemingly disparate groups, from such a panoply of regions, cultures, languages, religions, ethnicities, and structural positions in the economy, had come to be gathered in the same place.

The purpose of this paper is to make sociological sense of this curious collection of movements through a reconstruction of Karl Polanyi's (2001 [1944]) theory of the "double movement." Polanyi famously observed that 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century attempts to "dis-embed" the market from social controls to create a "self-regulating market" produced unprecedented social dislocations, resulting in widespread protective "counter-movements" against the "free market." According to Polanyi, creating a self-regulating market entails the commodification of land, labor, and money. Since these are "fictitious" commodities, placing their fate in the workings of the market creates tremendous social dislocations, leading to a widespread societal demand to "re-embed" the market within social and political controls. Polanyi called this reciprocal dis-embedding and re-embedding of the market the "double movement."

Though originally formulated to describe an earlier era of market liberalism, I argue that Polanyi's concept of the double movement has become relevant once again in the current era of market ascendancy. It helps us to understand the seemingly disparate kinds of movements that have emerged—and often joined forces in curious looking coalitions—to resist neoliberalism. In contrast to the Marxist tradition of social change, Polanyi provides a theory for understanding the composition and nature of a political coalition forged in relation to commodification rather than exploitation.

However, while useful enough to be worthy of theoretical reconstruction, Polanyi only provides a beginning. Because he assumes that countermovements arise mechanically and spontaneously, Polanyi fails to provide a theory of how a countermovement is organized. He does not develop the implications of organizing a political project bringing together people affected in different ways by the market. Moreover, his functionalist and organicist conception of society limits his ability to grasp how social structures of power and domination impede the construction and success of a countermovement. For Polanyi's theory of

the countermovement to be useful, we must understand the implications and challenges of organizing extraordinarily diverse political coalitions against commodification in an agonistic, not organic, society.

I will demonstrate how the nature of a Polanyian constituency creates particular difficulties for alliance-building in the construction of a counter-movement. I show that these constraints stem from the political, economic, and social diversity a Polanyian constituency inherently contains, as well as the diversity of the localized and single-issue struggles it would potentially unite. In sum, a Polanyian constituency brings together both diverse people (in terms of class, status, and politics) and diverse issues (as market displacements are experienced in a variety of ways). Polanyi did not appreciate these difficulties accompanying the constituency he described, and contemporary theorists who abstractly herald the upsurge of a global “multitude” (Hardt and Negri 2000, 2005) or a “movement of movements” (Mertes 2004) often elide them. I argue that understanding the prospects for a widespread and effective challenge to neoliberalism requires understanding how neoliberal globalization articulates with domestic social structures and political histories to produce variegated experiences of, and responses to, dislocation and displacement.

NAPM offers an ideal case study with which to reconstruct Polanyi’s theory of a countermovement. Founded in 1992, NAPM has been the largest attempt to coordinate resistance to the Indian government’s “New Economic Policies” of liberalization, globalization, and privatization. Trying to build social movement unity against these policies in the most diverse country on earth, NAPM reveals the possibilities and difficulties of organizing a contemporary “counter-movement” against neoliberal “dis-embedding” of the market.

Based on interviews with more than 30 movement activists and participant observation of NAPM conferences, protests and meetings over the course of several years,<sup>1</sup> I use the NAPM experience to illustrate the possibilities and constraints facing diverse movements trying to work together to build an effective social movement alliance against neoliberal globalization.

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<sup>1</sup> I conducted the formal ethnographic fieldwork for this paper in the Summer of 2006 and in March 2007. All interviews cited in this paper derive from this fieldwork. However, I previously spent a year among NAPM constituent movements (primarily the *Narmada Bachao Andolan*) in an informal research capacity during 2003-2004. During this period, I worked with NAPM leaders and attended NAPM meetings, conferences, and protests, while also working with one of its major constituent movements. This prior year of informal research provided essential background that allowed me to gather the observations and interviews for this paper.

### Reconstructing Polanyi for the Neoliberal Age

In recent years, social movements across the world have mounted increasingly coordinated resistance to the institutions of neoliberal capitalism. The convergence of a diverse range of Indian social movements under the NAPM banner is part of this global upsurge. Many of these “new social movements” (Omvedt 1993; Buechler 1995; Buechler 2000), far from emerging from the traditional Marxist proletariat, represent heterogeneous social and economic groups. They share not equivalent relationships to the means of production but variegated negative experiences with the manifold effects of market liberalization. In this sense, these new anti-systemic movements are closer to Polanyi’s (2001) concept of a protective “counter-movement” against the “satanic mill” of the self-regulating market than to the Marxist concept of a revolutionary class.

Polanyi argued that the intensified commodification of the “fictitious commodities” land, labor, and money in the attempt to create a self-regulating market produced unprecedented social strains. Because neither land nor labor is a real commodity – labor is nothing less than living human beings and land “an element of nature inextricably interwoven with man’s institutions” (187) – treating them as such is bound to wreak social havoc and foment resistance. Commodifying money, or in other words, creating speculative global currency markets, leads to financial instability and crisis. Observing the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century retractions from “free market” policies, Polanyi posited the concept of the “double movement” whereby efforts to “unnaturally” disembed markets from social relations inevitably lead to large scale societal movements for social protection:

Social history in the nineteenth century was thus the result of a double movement: the extension of the market organization in respect to genuine commodities was accompanied by its restriction in respect to fictitious ones. While on the one hand, markets spread all over the face of the globe and the amount of goods involved grew to unbelievable dimensions, on the other hand, a network of measures and policies was integrated into powerful institutions designed to check the action of the market relative to labor, land, and money... a deep-seated movement sprang into being to resist the pernicious effects of a market-controlled economy. Society protected itself against the perils inherent in a self-regulating market system—this was the one comprehensive feature in the history of the age (Polanyi 2001 [1944]: 80).

With the New Deal era in the United States, the widespread adoption of Keynesian policies, and a world-wide re-extension of political constraints on the market—which John Ruggie (1982) has called the era of “embedded liberalism”—Polanyi, writing towards the end of World War II, thought that the market had been re-embedded for good.

Polanyi did not anticipate the possibility that a *neoliberal* counterrevolution would once again dis-embed markets from social and political controls. Beginning in the 1970s and reaching maturity with the Reagan and Thatcherite policies of the 1980s, neoliberalism became the hegemonic model for structuring the relationship between states and markets. This model principally entailed transferring domains of social life from the former to the latter: deregulation of markets; privatization of public firms, natural resources, and public utilities; and the withdrawal of the state from many areas of social provision (Harvey 2005). Overall, neoliberalism called for “liberating” markets from state control and placing increasing realms of human action as well as natural resources under the direction of markets. With the encouragement and coercion of international financial institutions such as the IMF and World Bank, neoliberal restructuring spread rapidly through the global South in the 1990s. This “rebirth of the liberal creed” (Fourcade-Gourinchas and Babb 2002) and the accompanying emergence of social movements to resist it has led several scholars to resurrect Polanyi to understand the neoliberal era (*e.g.*, Watts 2000; Fourcade-Gourinchas and Babb 2002; Hart 2002; Arrighi and Silver 2003; Block 2003; Burawoy 2003).

This application of Polanyian concepts to the neoliberal era, though so far insufficiently developed, promises to be fruitful. Above all, Polanyi’s concept of the “counter-movement” for social protection provides an accurate and encompassing description of much current resistance to neoliberalism. Polanyi’s focus on exchange rather than production highlights the variegated ways in which different social groups experience marketization, rather than confining attention to groups (*i.e.*, the urban proletariat) that share a homologous relationship to the means of production (Burawoy 2003: 214). The intensified commodification of labor, capital, and especially land that neoliberal reforms have engineered has generated at least as much social and economic dislocation among other social sectors as it has among urban workers. Peasants, petty producers, fisherpeople, indigenous communities, and slum dwellers have seen their lives and livelihoods uprooted by the manifestations of “dis-embedding” markets from social relations. Agricultural laborers mobilize against the influx of cheap imported food under free-trade agreements, while peasants, indigenous communities, and fisherpeople fight displacement and disruption of livelihoods from the expropriation and insertion of common pool resources into the export economy. Scores of movements resist privatization of water and electric utilities. Environmental movements resist the ecological degradation of industrialization, urbanization, and the intensified exploitation of nature. There are widespread resistances to the dismantling of the welfare state (for example, the “IMF riots” against structural adjustment) and retrenchments in public goods. These are the types of movements that fill the ranks of NAPM.

Polanyi also perceptively recognized that a counter-movement is not simply a response to economic changes, but to the social dislocations they create. As Polanyi asserts of an earlier period of market expansion, “The Industrial Revolution was causing a social dislocation of stupendous proportions, and the problem of poverty was merely the economic aspect of this event” (2001 [1944]: 145). Similarly, many of the movements currently contesting neoliberal reforms object not only to their economic implications, but also to their disruption of established social, cultural, and ecological relationships.

Finally, the Polanyian concept of “re-embedding” the market provides a useful way of thinking about the alternatives these movements propose. For Polanyi, a counter-movement is directed towards a broad “re-embedding” of the market within social relations. While the concept is undoubtedly vague in Polanyi and can be taken in more or less radical ways (which I will return to shortly), it is a fairly accurate theoretical umbrella for understanding what current movements are working towards. Most reject any singular or monolithic utopian alternative (such as state socialism) and instead invoke a plurality of alternatives that respond to a multiplicity of (often place-based) visions. As I show with NAPM, one of the strongest threads tying these movements together is a commitment to deepening democratic control over markets, productive resources, and economic development more generally. In addition to contentious politics, many of these movements actively engage in prefigurative construction of alternative social and economic models, or “Real Utopias” (Wright forthcoming). The World Social Forum slogan “Another World is Possible” reflects this pluralist approach to alternatives. It implies a relatively coherent consensus in the rejection of the prevailing social and political-economic order, but leaves open the question of what “another world” might look like. In this conceptualization of building “another world,” there is a productive dialectic between uniting against the common enemy and affirming plurality. One might say that resisting the hegemonic logic of neoliberalism is a necessary precondition for the diversity and radical democracy these movements are working for. This is quite similar to Polanyi’s observation that a common effort at decommodification and social re-embedding would give rise to a plurality of alternatives:

To remove the elements of production—land, labor, and money—from the market is thus a uniform act only from the viewpoint of the market, which was dealing with them as if they were commodities. From the viewpoint of human reality that which is restored by the disestablishment of the commodity fiction lies in all directions of the social compass. In effect, the disintegration of a uniform market economy is already giving rise to a variety of new societies. (Polanyi 2001: 260).

Polanyi's analysis is manifested today in many social movements such as those in NAPM who see neoliberalism as the most totalizing force shaping the world, thus making effective resistance a precondition for a diversity of alternatives to emerge.

Nonetheless, while Polanyi's theory of the "double-movement" is useful enough to be worthy of theoretical reconstruction, it is also in need of significant amendments before it can usefully illuminate the nature of contemporary countermovements. Perhaps where Polanyi falls most glaringly short is in showing how a countermovement is organized and constructed. Polanyi's analysis of "The Great Transformation" is plagued by an overly organic conception of society, which as Burawoy (2003) notes, fails to appreciate the Gramscian insight that civil society is both a site of capitalist hegemony as well as a potential terrain of resistance. Challenging the "self-regulating" market will not be some spontaneous, mechanical, and consensual reaction of "society" to the onslaught of the market, as Polanyi maintains. Counter-hegemony must be organized in the "trenches" (Gramsci 1972).

This is related to another shortcoming of Polanyi: his indeterminacy about which class takes the lead in social protection. At various times, Polanyi identifies the working class as the vanguard of social protection, at other times the landed aristocracy (2001 [1944]: 139, 162). Although he asserts that the "trading classes" "had no organ to sense the dangers" of the self-regulating market and thus cannot be relied upon for the protection of society, he clearly states that it is in their best interests to do so (2001 [1944]: 139). Moreover, elite-driven legislation comprises a significant part of Polanyi's description of the counter-movement. The important point, however, is that for Polanyi, whichever class takes the lead does so not out of narrow self-interest, but out of the functional need of society to protect itself. Polanyi's organic conception of society appears naïve about class power and class interests.

This has to be understood in relation to a third ambiguity in Polanyi's thesis: namely, how radical is the counter-movement's social re-embedding of the market? Does it involve the transformation of class relations? What exactly does he mean by the decommodification of land, labor, and capital? On the one hand, we have the New Deal side of Polanyi. This version of embeddedness suggests protections for workers and the environment, regulation of markets, and an overall macro-economic vision akin to "embedded liberalism" (Ruggie 1982). However, there is also the Owenite moment in Polanyi that seems captivated by the vision of a "cooperative commonwealth." This suggests a more radical re-embedding and a transformation of property relations, not just through state action, but also by civil society itself asserting control over the economy.

Whichever reading one takes of Polanyi, it seems clear (and here we need to bring Marx back in) that the class positions of the major protagonists of the counter-movement will largely shape the character of the re-embedding. The new social movements resisting neo-liberal globalization, including the ones in NAPM, tend to be organized around more radically socialist-anarchist visions than embedded liberalism (Omvedt 1993; Graeber 2002; Mertes 2004). They are largely led by the economically marginalized classes and they seek social and economic transformations that are in many ways incompatible with the interests of economic elites, even if some of their demands (like capital controls and protection of the environment) might serve long-term elite interests.

I can briefly illustrate this contrast in the Indian case. The Nehruvian state, with its political control over markets and nominal state socialism, could be seen as a classic (if ineffective) example of the “embedded liberal” version of Polanyi. Yet, most of the social movements in NAPM, while resisting neoliberalism, have also organized explicitly against the centralizing “high-modernist” (Scott 1998) development vision of the Nehruvian state (Baviskar 1998). Their visions involve more decentralized, democratic control over natural resources, productive assets, and the market. We might call this a “deep social re-embedding” of the market as opposed to the “shallow political re-embedding” embodied by the interventionist developmental state. What this distinction suggests is that a protective counter-movement for a “deep” re-embedding of the market (such as NAPM) will primarily depend on the marginalized and displaced *fighting against* the landed and “trading” classes. Later in this paper, I will further specify the class horizons of such a Polanyian constituency.

Finally, in the current context of globalization, it is clear that a counter-movement must necessarily be organized on a different scale than Polanyi envisioned. Polanyi saw the counter-movement as a multitude of dispersed and fragmented reactions at the local or national level. Yet, it is clear that any movement for counter-hegemonic globalization will necessarily entail multi-level contestation at the local, national, and transnational levels (Evans 2000, 2005). While Polanyi can help us “think of the way transnational society is forged in response to commodification” (Burawoy 2003) this only says that such a group or class (broadly construed) exists on paper. The theoretical existence of structural homologies and common interests between groups does not necessarily translate into solidarity. As Pierre Bourdieu admonishes, it is important not to mistake things of logic for the logic of things by confusing classes on paper with classes in reality. The latter only comes at the “price of a political work of mobilization” (Bourdieu 1998: 11). Thus, even if we can identify a latent Polanyian constituency in theory, a self-conscious and politically organized counter-movement is another

matter. We are still left with the thorny question of whether and in what form disparate social groups, who might share a similar objective interest in transforming neoliberal globalization, can perceive some kind of unity among the diversity of their experiences and organize an effective political project.

The crucial point is that while Polanyi provides the best concept for understanding the constituency that is most likely to emerge in opposition to the market, he fails to provide a theory of how that opposition is organized. He attunes us to a latent oppositional class forged out of negative experiences with the market. However, his functionalist concept of society, coupled with his insistence on the mechanical and inexorable nature of the double movement, blinds him to the complications that attend the political organization of such an anti-market constituency. Polanyi not only inaccurately describes the class composition of the countermovement (for example, including the landed aristocracy but not peasants), but he also fails to comprehend how social structures such as class or social status impede the realization and success of a countermovement. Further, he fails to understand the difficulties arising from the ways in which market dislocations are manifested as they intersect the diverse, complex, and antagonistically divided terrain that he collapses under the term “society.” While there is systematicity to the dislocations felt, for example, by fisher people in Kerala and slum-dwellers in Bombay (both can be traced to a package of neoliberal policies and logics), local people nonetheless experience them in very different ways. Tolstoy wrote in *Anna Karenina*, “Every unhappy family is unhappy in its own way.” Likewise, unhappy experiences of neoliberalism take different forms for different people in different places. The result is a proliferation of grievances whose interrelation is not always immediately apparent and the much remarked “single issue” nature of many contemporary social movements (and the seeming confusion of mainstream observers of what exactly protesters at the IMF, World Bank, and WTO are about). How to reassemble these pieces in a way that would enable resistance with a sufficient level of coordination for a “counter-movement” to be successful is an open question. This study is an effort to understand the lessons of the biggest attempt to build such a social movement alliance against neoliberalism in India.

### **NAPM and the Social Constraints on Alliance Building**

To illustrate the prospects and challenges for NAPM in building an alliance to resist neoliberal globalization, we must have an understanding of the social composition and political histories of the

social movements that comprise it.<sup>2</sup> Perhaps the first addition we must make to Polanyi's theory is that a countermovement does not emerge and exist *sui generis*: it is organized by activists, often through pre-existing forms of political organization. In the case of NAPM, this was the "new social movement" (Omvedt 1993; Buechler 1995; Buechler 2000; Routledge 1993) milieu that emerged in India during the 1970s. Gail Omvedt, in her definitive account of the formation of these movements, writes that they were comprised of groups ignored by traditional Marxism and "left unconceptualized by a preoccupation with 'private property' and wage labor" (Omvedt 1993: xv). These movements, responding to forms of social and economic injustice neglected by the organized Left, were faced with the task of reconstituting a new kind of politics, or in Omvedt's words, "reinventing revolution." To do so, they drew upon a variety of discourses—Gandhianism, Ambedkarism, environmentalism, feminism, and various shades of socialism—to forge new kinds of political practice outside of the discredited realm of electoral politics (Kothari and Sethi 1984).

As neoliberal reforms accelerated in the early 1990s and began to affect all of these movements in different ways, a number of activists created NAPM as a way to unite them. Many of the movements that would join NAPM in the 1990s had already been working on issues concerning the poor and marginalized, and were involved in challenging the hegemonic "high-modernist" development project (McMichael 1996; Scott 1998) before entering the fray over globalization. However, it was the common challenge of the Indian government's drive towards liberalization that brought many of them together in the early 1990s (Sheth n.d.: 1). In 1992, the Indian government passed its New Economic Policy (NEP) that would dismantle the quasi-socialist protectionism of the Nehruvian state, and thus "dis-embed" the market through a process of globalization, liberalization, and privatization. Many social movements saw that such policies would further undermine traditional livelihoods, remove possibilities for democracy, and intensify the multiple forms of exploitation and domination that they had been fighting against. In the same year, Hindu fundamentalists shook the nation with the demolition of the Babri Masjid in Ayodhya, unleashing communal riots across India. As

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<sup>2</sup> I am taking a methodological cue from Gramsci who, in his discussion of "The Modern Prince," suggests posing the question of counter-hegemony thus: "When can the conditions for awakening and developing a national-popular collective will be said to exist?" To answer the question, he proposes undertaking "an historical (economic) analysis of the social structure of the given country and a 'dramatic' representation of the attempts made in the course of centuries to awaken this will, together with the reasons for the successive failures" (1972: 130). Though I stop short of his suggested time frame, I do attempt to take seriously his suggestion to ground analyses of counter-hegemonic movements within particular social structures and political histories. This is a decidedly different way of posing and answering the question than that of a significant section of social movement theory which tends to invoke presumably ahistorical and universal variables for understanding social movement dynamics (Jasper and Goodwin 1999).

NAPM recalled in one of its foundational documents, these two events “lent a still greater urgency to the need for an effective alliance to strengthen the secular ethos and struggle for development that empowers people against the hegemonic, exploitative culture associated with the terms ‘privatisation’ and ‘liberalization’” (NAPM 1996). Thus, as neoliberalism distributed dislocations across the complex terrain of Indian society, a number of pre-existing movements organized resistance.

Between 1992 and 1996, social movements from across India began coming together to discuss building a national alliance to challenge the common threat of neoliberal globalization. Activists organized mass rallies, conferences, and public hearings on the NEP across India (NAPM 1996). This was followed by a series of regional meetings that started to flesh out an ideological charter for the new alliance. A 1995 conference on “Development and Displacement” further helped to bring together a number of organizations resisting “anti-people” development policies. Finally, at a national conference in 1996, after almost four years of organizing and discussion, NAPM produced an ideological charter (People’s Resolve) and a national program which laid out the common minimum commitments of the allied movements and set forth a plan of action.

NAPM’s resolve and its many ideological proclamations cover a vast territory of issues. Its chief ideological tenets are: 1) resistance to neoliberalism as well as the modernizing state development project; 2) resistance to casteism and communalism; 3) commitment to non-violence; and 4) an affirmative belief in direct democracy and decentralized “alternative development.” I argue, however, that NAPM’s most salient “master frame”—the discourse that most accurately captures what most of its movements are fighting and that “articulates” (Laclau and Mouffe 1985) its constituency—is that of “displacement” by a dis-embedded market. Beneath all their diversity, what most of these movements hold in common is displacement from homes, fields, forests, fisheries, water sources, and means of livelihood by dams, mining projects, slum demolitions, Coca Cola factories, urban renewal schemes, Special Economic Zones, steel plants, forest enclosures, new industrial technologies, and various other forms of dislocation and dispossession which have intensified in the neoliberal era. This list shows the predominance of displacement from land, or natural resources more broadly. Whether it is against slum demolitions that turn people’s homes and communities into real estate developments, or against private corporations appropriating people’s forests, fields, or water, fighting for community control over land and natural resources is central to NAPM’s agenda. NAPM seeks, in the words of its founding document, to create, “A people’s democracy based on people’s control over resources,” in which, “the basic principle will be that the first claim on the use of

resources will be with regard to the satisfaction of basic needs and the protection of livelihood” (NAPM 1996). Thus, NAPM calls for a radical decommodification of land and the re-embedding of natural resources within the direct democratic control of communities. While it does not exhaust all the issues that NAPM is fighting for, I argue that NAPM is principally an attempt to create an organized countermovement against the intensified commodification of land—or, as Polanyi put it, “the subjection of the surface of the planet to the needs of an industrial society” (2001: 188). There are relatively few labor unions in NAPM, and these are mostly rural agricultural laborers and, to a lesser extent, urban workers in the informal sector.<sup>3</sup> Predominant are small peasants, fisherpeople, indigenous groups (*adivasis*), rural landless, and urban slum dwellers organized not as workers but as *people* fighting for control over land and natural resources that are increasingly being appropriated and inserted as factors of production into a global economy.

Yet, NAPM’s efforts at uniting this diverse constituency and providing it national-level political coherence has produced mixed results. On one level, NAPM has brought into its alliance roughly 200 movements spread across at least 18 states in an incredibly diverse country. Although some are more active than others, and membership remains fairly informal and porous, many of these movements give each other much-needed solidarity in their respective struggles. On another level, NAPM has had some effectiveness in creating what one might call a “counter public sphere” (Fraser 1992) for ideas that had no home in mainstream Indian politics. NAPM has provided an organizational and discursive place for the new social movements whose critiques of development, for example, were not reflected in the platforms of even left political parties. By bringing these movements together, it has generated a space for discussion, debate, and sharing of experiences; in the process, it has facilitated greater ideological coherence among them. NAPM has also helped to give these ideas a level of public attention and media recognition, thus infiltrating the dominant public sphere.

When it comes to success in national level campaigns directed at fundamental policy changes to re-embed the market, NAPM’s record of achievement is more modest. Its most notable achievement so far has been the Right to Information Act (RTI), which was passed in multiple states and finally at the national level after being initiated by the MKSS peasant-worker movement in Rajasthan with the support of NAPM and other social movements and NGOs. The RTI will at least facilitate greater community oversight of development projects and, for example, help displaced villagers gain access to government documents to enforce legal

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<sup>3</sup> While these landless and informal laborer’s unions in NAPM do oppose land expropriation (whether for slum demolitions or other development projects), they are more focused on land-reform and comprehensive labor regulations[0] respectively.

compensation. In the past year, a coalition of social movements that included but was broader than NAPM succeeded in passing a Forest Bill that, while watered down, should pave the way for some regularization of forest rights, or at least prevent evictions of people whose titles and rights have not been historically respected by the Indian government. Recently, a violent struggle in Nandigram West Bengal that NAPM activists were involved in also succeeded in forcing the government to issue a temporary moratorium on Special Economic Zones (SEZs) that resulted in a revamped resettlement and rehabilitation policy (though not very progressive or close to what the movements have demanded) and some limitations on the size of SEZs. This was the culmination of fierce and even violent battles from Maharashtra to West Bengal (as well as solidarity protests across the country) in opposition to large-scale involuntary land acquisitions for these tax-free and unregulated industrial areas, which the Indian government has been pushing in recent years to promote global exports. These are the kinds of limited, single-issue successes in which NAPM has played a part.

However, while NAPM has taken up a number of other issues at the national level (slum demolitions, water policy, land acquisition laws, informal labor legislation, fishing rights, panchayat reform and many others), none of these efforts have resulted in large victories. NAPM's ability to organize its constituent members for coordinated and sustained collective action on the national level has remained limited. In particular, it has proved to be incredibly difficult to muster commitment by constituent movements for action that transcends their single-issue or local orientations. In March 2007, NAPM launched its biggest attempt to mobilize all of its constituent movements for a national-level protest to challenge neoliberal policies in Delhi. The results were mixed. While the protest drew thousands of people from very diverse movements from at least 16 states of India, the turnout was less than anticipated and not enough to have a very significant political impact in Delhi. The protest, whose lessons I will discuss more fully later, demonstrated the difficulty of uniting movements into a common political effort that is more comprehensive and systemic than the particular issues they are individually facing. It also showed the challenges of overcoming the social divides that make organizing a Polanyian constituency (which is inherently cross-class) extraordinarily difficult.

Thus, not even NAPM activists would suggest that they have come close to achieving something like a cohesive national movement. NAPM still has limited national level organization, and has had only a few major campaigns that have achieved significant national level participation. There is widespread feeling in NAPM that it is falling short of its goals and that the overwhelming momentum of neoliberal globalization cannot possibly be challenged without stronger and more

coordinated national level organization. This has prompted many of NAPM's leaders in recent years to call for a movement towards a singular "National People's Movement" or "NPM" instead of NAPM. Action 2007 was an attempt to move in this direction. In what follows, I begin to offer an explanation for some of the major obstacles NAPM has faced in its efforts to create this stronger and more cohesive political alliance to resist neoliberalism. I divide these obstacles into two categories: 1) social structural contradictions and antagonistic political histories; and 2) the single-issue and localized nature of neoliberal dislocations. Both obstacles stem from the diversity of people and issues that a Polanyian constituency brings together.

### **Social Structure and Political Histories.**

An attempt to build a national alliance whose constituency might share only a common opposition to neoliberal globalization cannot help but to reflect and confront the antagonisms and contradictions that define the social structure of India, and that have shaped the political histories of its movements. Most obvious are the ever-salient issues of class and caste to which I will confine my attention here, though they by no means exhaust the lines of division in Indian society or NAPM. I will briefly illustrate how class, caste, and associated political histories pose challenges for NAPM's alliance ambitions by examining the tensions and conflicts underlying its uneasy relationship with farmers' movements and Dalit movements. Dalits and farmers comprise a huge proportion of the Indian populace and some of their movements, particularly those of farmers, boast memberships in the millions. Having them as active members would very significantly expand NAPM's mass base and strengthen its national-level power. Yet, even though by many accounts large numbers of farmers and Dalits are being hurt by neoliberal policies, NAPM has found it difficult to incorporate the major farmer and Dalit movements. As the analysis will show, this occurs despite the fact that NAPM's ideological statements consistently incorporate farmers' and Dalits' major demands.

#### *Farmers: Class and Caste Contradictions and the Limits of Alliance*

During NAPM's conferences in 2006, the farmer question was at the top of the agenda. How could NAPM build alliances with India's farmers' movements, some of them boasting a constituency in the millions, who for the most part had not joined NAPM? It is not that NAPM's constituency of movements does not include farmers. On the contrary, there are many movements within NAPM comprised of rural agriculturalists. It is important to understand, however, what is meant by "farmers' movements" in India. The contemporary "autonomous farmers'

movements” emerged in the early 1970s as upsurges of mainly middle-caste landed farmers against what was seen as exploitative surplus extraction from the countryside via the price mechanism (Omvedt 1993, 2005). Much of their agitation has been directed towards obtaining more remunerative state prices for their produce and subsidies for electricity, water, and other agricultural inputs. Ideologically and organizationally, they have stood apart from both the Marxist left and the reformist mainstream political parties. Eschewing a conventional Marxist class analysis, movement leaders such as Sharad Joshi of the Maharashtra-based *Shetkari Sanghatana* posited the principle divide as between modern urban “India” and rural “Bharat.” Thus, the essential social antagonism was between urban and rural with the latter basing its development on the exploitation of the toiling rural masses. These movements quickly grew sizable mass bases and were soon able to exert some influence on Indian politics, often through massive demonstrations and tractor processions in major Indian cities (Omvedt 1993, 2005).

Of course, positing the central social antagonism as between urban India and rural Bharat elides the intense forms of inequality and exploitation within the countryside. Most of these movements were of middle to upper-caste farmers, with few Dalits. Though these strata of farmers would probably be considered poor by Western standards, the Indian Left traditionally saw them as exploiters of landless laborers, many of whom were Dalit. Indeed, these farmers have an objective interest in maintaining social structures of power that ensure a low-wage workforce of landless laborers. While some of these movements have since included demands that at least rhetorically address some of the issues of landless laborers in their platform, there remains this central class and caste contradiction. Whether or not these contradictions are objective and insurmountable, landless laborers and Dalit movements, including the ones in NAPM, remain skeptical of the movements’ intentions. Even the staggering agrarian crisis currently underway in India, with thousands of farmers committing suicide each year (and which by many accounts is the result of neoliberal policies and green revolution technology) has not brought NAPM and many of these movements closer together. In part, this demonstrates one of the difficult implications of building a Polanyian countermovement: trying to reconcile different and sometimes contradictory class positions to create a common anti-market politics.

The other closely related source of political tension between the farmers’ movements and the other “new social movements” of NAPM is the former’s embrace of modern industrial farming technologies. Farmers’ movement leaders like Sharad Joshi and Tikait of the *Bharatiya Kisan Union* (BKU—Indian Farmers Union) reject Gandhian anti-industrialism as romantic and fully embrace modern forces of production

in agriculture, which are seen as destructive and exploitative by movements in NAPM. This deep tension was perhaps most clearly demonstrated in 1999, when Joshi led a mass movement of Gujarati farmers in a protest in support of the Sardar Sarovar Dam, which the *Narmada Bachao Andolan* (“Save the Narmada Movement”—one of the founding movements of NAPM) had spent the last 15 years fighting (Omvedt 2005). Many of the farmers’ movements such as Joshi’s have also embraced genetically modified seeds and green revolution technology (Herring 2005; Omvedt 2005), seen by most NAPM movements as ecologically destructive and as a means of neo-colonial exploitation by multinational corporations. Moreover, many landless laborers are being displaced by the introduction of labor-saving technologies in agriculture, which benefit large farmers and are embraced by their major movements. Thus, opposing class interests are also reflected in conflicting approaches to modern technology and infrastructure.

These class and closely associated caste limits on alliance-building were shown clearly in NAPM’s Action 2007. On the one hand, Action 2007 witnessed a positive development with the presence of a few thousand farmers from Madhya Pradesh’s *Kisan Sangarsh Samiti* (peasant struggle organization). This movement probably had the highest attendance of any single movement at the event. However, day three of the protest also dramatically demonstrated the class and caste limits of NAPM’s alliance with farmers’ movements. By chance, the *Bharatiya Kisan Union* (BKU), one of the biggest farmers’ movements in India, had organized a protest on that day directly adjacent to where Action 2007 was being held. Thousands of farmers, mostly from the relatively well off and dominant Jat caste from Uttar Pradesh and sporting the BKU’s characteristic green hats and large sticks, threateningly took over the street. A succession of almost exclusively male leaders delivered booming orations through a loudspeaker that overpowered the proceedings at Action 2007. While the two gatherings unfolded separately less than 20 yards apart, the themes were remarkably similar. BKU speakers railed against SEZs and the violent attempts by the West Bengal government to appropriate farmers’ land in Nandigram. They decried globalization and particularly the WTO and the cheap imported grain that is undermining crop prices for Indian farmers. In recognition of this similarity of agenda, NAPM leader Medha Patkar decided to reach out and speak to the BKU rally. However, while she did not explicitly endorse the BKU and made a point of raising the caste issue, this decision turned out to be controversial within NAPM.

The following day, somewhere between 1000 and 2000 people from the National Forum of Forest Workers and Forest People (NFFPF) abruptly left the NAPM gathering. NFFPF leader Ashok Choudhary

explained to me that the primarily Dalit and Adivasi members of NFFPF were thoroughly discouraged and depressed by the previous day's BKU rally. He explained that Jat farmers from the BKU exploit the members of NFFPF as laborers in their villages, disproportionately appropriate the natural resources from village common lands, and generally dominate the NFFPF members socially and politically. When the Dalits and Adivasis from NFFPF come to Delhi to protest their circumstances, the same upper caste farmers appear to be taking over their action. Not only that, but NAPM leaders address the farmers' rally. Thoroughly discouraged, Choudhary explained, they went home (Personal interview). While perhaps based on a misunderstanding, this incident showed the class and caste limits of alliance. While NFFPF and the BKU share the negative solidarity of opposing similar things (certain aspects of neoliberal globalization), their overall class interests and positive visions are distinct and contradictory. If NAPM is going to contain landless laborers, it cannot include large landed farmers.

But, how can we explain the presence of the *Madhya Pradesh Kisan Sangarsh Samiti* (MPKSS) farmers' organization within NAPM? I asked Ashok Choudhary of the NFFPF and P. Chenniah, leader of the large (and primarily Dalit) Andhra Pradesh Agricultural Workers Union (APVVU), why they can work with a group like the MPKSS and not the BKU. They replied that while the BKU was comprised of relatively wealthy and dominant caste farmers from fertile Green Revolution areas of the Punjab and Uttar Pradesh, the MPKSS was of mostly smaller farmers from less dominant castes in a less fertile area. Where the former exploited large numbers of lower caste laborers, the latter were mostly small farmers, some of them tenants, employing only a few laborers, if any, outside of their own family. Thus, it appears that the social limits of an alliance that includes lower caste landless laborers is somewhere between the small and large peasantry. While there might still be some contradictions between small peasants and the landless, Chenniah explained that these are not sufficiently antagonistic to impede alliance. "There are some areas we don't compromise [and] there are some areas we have to work at a wider level because we have bigger enemies ... So, that level of perception has to come between the leaders. We are not compromising the land question, but when it comes to WTO, it has to be a larger question" (Personal interview). Thus, the common compulsion to resist neoliberal globalization, while unable to bridge sharply contradictory class and caste interests, does have the potential to forge cross-class and cross-caste coalitions among less antagonistic sectors.

In sum, the inability of NAPM to work with the majority of large farmers' movements has its roots in social structures of caste and class, and antagonistic political histories based partly on different views of modern agricultural technology. At NAPM's conference on

displacement in July 2006, participants discussed whether these contradictions were insurmountable. For example, one activist suggested that higher agricultural surplus would benefit both landed farmers and landless laborers. They further noted that the current agrarian crisis, exemplified by a staggering toll of farmer suicides, was demonstrating the dire consequences of neoliberal reforms for farmers. Discussion followed on whether NAPM's frame of "displacement" could be extended to incorporate these market-driven dislocations. Medha Patkar remarked, "The government says people are committing suicide on their own. But it is murder not suicide. There is a very thin line between forced and 'voluntary' displacement by transfer of resources." A strong statement on the agrarian crisis was included in NAPM's public statement from the national conference in May. But, while NAPM and the farmers' movements might share some similar interests in resisting neoliberal globalization, divergent class interests and antagonistic political histories are not easily overcome. There appear to be social structural limits to explicit alliance between groups who otherwise share common dislocation by neoliberal globalization.

### *Dalits and Displacement*

NAPM's People's Resolve states, "We stand in solidarity with the struggles of Dalits to secure fundamental human rights and justice" and "oppose casteism in its entirety." The Resolve also calls for reservations of public sector jobs for Dalits, a continually contentious issue in Indian politics. These positions are repeated in all the subsequent proclamations that accompany national conferences. Yet, historically, most of the major Dalit movements have not joined NAPM. This is not to say that there are no Dalits in NAPM. In fact, there are many movements such as the Andhra Pradesh Agricultural Workers Union (APVVU) or the anti-slum demolition movements in Bombay and Delhi, who are mostly Dalit or other low caste laborers. However, the important differences between these movements and Dalit movements is the priority they give to the economic versus social dimension of caste. This, in turn, raises an important question concerning the potential and limits of an alliance organized around the "master frame" of market displacement.

But, we should first recognize several historic features of Dalit politics that condition the terrain on which any alliance can unfold. The first stems from a long and disillusioning history of upper-caste co-optation of Dalit movements by both the Congress and Marxist Left parties (Jaffrelot 2003). Non-party Dalit movements have thus been characterized by a desire for autonomy and an unwillingness to compromise Dalit leadership by entering into parties or alliances that are not controlled by Dalits (Omvedt 1993). As Omvedt writes, "The Dalit and anticaste movement emerged under firm ideology of autonomy,

hostile to upper caste leadership even when embodied in progressive political parties” (1993: 74). Thus, drawing Dalit movements into an alliance that is not exclusively controlled by Dalits themselves would have to overcome the legacy of this bitter history.

Another conflict is on the level of ideology. Most Dalit movements take their ideological inspiration principally from Dr. B.R. Ambedkar, Dalit freedom fighter, intellectual, and author of India’s constitution. For Dalits, it was Ambedkar not Gandhi who was the principal hero of the independence struggle. Many Dalits, following Ambedkar, are quite hostile to Gandhi, who they criticize for having been paternalistic to lower castes, sympathetic to an “original” and apparently non-coercive Hindu conception of caste, and unable to launch a national campaign against the caste system (Ambedkar 1945; Jaffrelot 1996; Shah 2001). The Ambedkarism of Dalits sits uneasily with the neo-Gandhian strain that is prominent in NAPM. Some Dalits see NAPM’s calls for decentralized village democracy (embodied in its slogan “our rule in our villages”) as a continuation of Gandhi’s romanticization of village life, which overlooks intense forms of inequality and caste domination within the “traditional” Indian village (Prasad 2001). As Dalit scholar and activist Gopal Guru puts it, “Our rule in our villages? What do you mean when you say community resources? Community is not an abstract category. Who is dominant in the community?” (Personal interview). Thus, for Dalits, neo-Gandhian invocations of decentralized village democracy—such as in NAPM’s slogan “our rule in our villages”—elide the brutal caste domination that exists *within* Indian villages.

It is for this reason that Ambedkar flatly dismissed Gandhian economics and heartily supported modernization and industrialization, believing that it would help to break the caste system (Ambedkar 1945: 294-295; Omvedt 2001: 148). Dalits, in his view, had no prospects for upward mobility in traditional Indian society and should thus strive for the fruits and freedoms modernity could offer. Consequently, NAPM’s quasi-Gandhian and ecological critiques of industrialization, multinational corporations, and the New Economic Policies did not initially resonate with Ambedkarite Dalits. Speaking of the early days of organizing against the New Economic Policies, NAPM leader Medha Patkar recalls, “At that time, many of the Dalit organizations were clearly saying that this is something they cannot oppose because it is an opportunity for the Dalits. And these are the upper caste activists, the Brahminist activists that are opposing” (Personal interview). At least in its early days, many Dalit movements did not share NAPM’s critique of neoliberal globalization.

However, Dalit opinions towards globalization appear to have changed over the course of the past 15 years as the effects of

liberalization on Dalits have become apparent. Whether it is bearing the brunt of agricultural liberalization as landless laborers, being subjected to ruthless slum demolitions as urban poor, facing disproportionate displacement by development projects, or having diminishing access to “reserved” public sector jobs because of privatization, Dalits have probably been the worst hit by neoliberal globalization (Teltumbde 1996; Shah 2001: 40). As a result, the vast majority of autonomous Dalit movements now oppose globalization. Among all the Dalit activists and intellectuals I interviewed, there was the common perception that Dalits are disproportionately hurt by the dislocations of globalization, and that pro-globalization views are now marginal among autonomous Dalit movements. In 2006, The National Commission for Dalit Human Rights (NCDHR), one of the major networks of Dalit movements, officially joined NAPM. Along with the National Coalition of Dalit Organizations (NCDOR), it participated in Action 2007 and some of its leaders even went to jail with other NAPM activists over water policies. This at least suggests greater prospects for cross-issue alliance and cooperation with Dalit movements than there appeared to be in the past.

It is still too soon to say how strong this emerging relationship will be. Among Dalit movements, ending the caste system is the top priority. Some Dalits are critical of NAPM for not doing enough to oppose the caste system in itself (Guru, personal interview). On the other hand, some leaders of landless and informal laborer unions in NAPM (and whose constituency is largely Dalit) argue that too much of Dalit politics is directed at symbolic issues of recognition, such as erecting Ambedkar statues, and the acquisition of political and economic power by a small Dalit elite. For them, the most important issues facing Dalits are those of land and wages. This opposition between the social and economic dimensions of caste power raises a very interesting and important question about the nature and content of an alliance like NAPM: while the original impetus for NAPM was the need for a collective response to neoliberal globalization, can and should an alliance of movements focus on resisting neoliberalism without addressing other and much older forms of social domination? Can and must an alliance like NAPM aspire to be not only an alliance against neoliberalism but also a counterhegemonic alliance more generally?

This is essentially the argument of Laclau and Mouffe (1985) who, in reconstructing the notion of hegemony, argue for a de-centering of class and recognition of the full spectrum of social antagonisms. While they direct their criticism at an orthodox Marxist conception of class struggle, it could equally be leveled at a Polanyian politics in so far as it directs struggle solely towards the market. But, Laclau and Mouffe make the case that resistance to multiple forms of social domination should be linked not only because they are important in themselves, but also

because “articulating” these diverse struggles is a precondition for the success of any of them. The only way to challenge the coordination and power of the Right is to create what they call a “chain of democratic equivalences,” or a unity premised on radical democratic plurality, in which alliance is based on a common commitment to dismantling the multiple forms of social and economic domination.

NAPM has shared this critique of classic Marxism, and has integrated a variety of social and cultural antagonisms—including caste, gender, religion and indigeneity—into its discourse of social change. On one level, it does this by constantly emphasizing the extent to which those who are already the most marginalized in Indian society are the hardest hit by globalization, privatization, and liberalization. In this way, NAPM tries to “articulate” the current process of neo-liberalism (and “anti-people” development more generally) with old forms of social domination—of Adivasis, Dalits, Muslims, and women. For example, NAPM’s 2004 conference declaration states, “The adverse impact of globalization, privatization policies on Dalits should be spelled out clearly, and we call upon all organisations to prepare alternative development plan[s] with Dalit perspective” (NAPM 2004). It also calls for a fundamental right to work that must especially apply to Dalits to address their historic exploitation. NAPM’s rhetoric habitually emphasizes the disproportionate effects of neoliberalism on socially dominated and marginalized groups.

However, in addition to highlighting the ways in which socially marginalized groups are disproportionately affected by flawed development projects and neo-liberal economic reforms, NAPM also takes strong stances against the *other* forms of social domination and exclusion that these groups face. The 1996 People’s Resolve, as well as the 2004 National Conference Declaration, make strong statements against the caste-system, communalism, patriarchy, and encroachments on Adivasi self-rule. With respect to caste, the Resolve calls for solidarity with Dalits in their struggle for human rights and justice, and it includes job reservations for Dalits in its list of demands. It also “resolves to intervene in caste and communal riots to establish peace and protection of life and livelihood” (NAPM 1996). Thus, in addition to recognizing the disproportionate economic effects borne by socially marginalized and dominated groups, it also denounces the social and cultural dimensions of domination that exist apart from neoliberalism and “development.”

Nonetheless, some Dalits are still critical of the extent to which this discourse has been matched with practice. Gopal Guru argues that NAPM leaders have not traveled around the country responding to instances of Dalit atrocities as they have done for incidents of displacement. Guru states, “There has to be a very *thorough* sensitivity to

Dalit issues. But they [NAPM] have other priorities [*i.e.*, displacement]" (Personal interview). It does seem, however, that NAPM has internalized these criticisms and has been making a strong effort to intervene in explicitly caste issues. As a part of Action 2007, there was a day devoted to discussion of Dalit issues with prominent national Dalit groups; a public condemnation of a Supreme Court decision staying reservations in higher education; and a national day of action on Dalit Human Rights Day, Ambedkar's birthday. This effort to more explicitly tackle caste issues could partly explain the recent addition of substantial Dalit movements to NAPM's membership.

That NAPM has moved in this direction, even if not to the satisfaction of all Dalit activists and intellectuals, raises a more general question about a Polanyian countermovement. In addition to struggling against market dislocations and for a re-embedding of the market, a counter-movement might become—and might need to become—something much more than that. Aside from the intrinsic importance of resisting other kinds of power, to actually become a broad enough coalition or "bloc" to successfully resist neoliberalism, a counter-movement might need to take up and "articulate" many other relevant dimensions of power and domination. In other words, a Polanyian countermovement might need to become a "counterhegemonic" movement more generally. As I mentioned earlier, many of these movements were working for social and economic justice or against capitalism more generally before neoliberalism came along. Their positive visions of an egalitarian and democratic society would be impossible with the continued existence of a caste system. I call NAPM's struggles emblematic of a Polanyian counter-movement because the shared need to resist market dislocations brings these movements together and provides the impetus for the alliance. But, resisting neoliberalism does not exhaust the political ambitions of its movements. The question, which I can only leave open, is whether the alliance can and should incorporate all the ambitions and struggles of the marginalized and exploited, or stay focused on its initial impetus to resist neoliberalism. In theory, NAPM seems to believe the former. This expansiveness of agenda introduces both new opportunities as well as new complexities to an alliance like NAPM, which, as the next section will show, is already struggling to find unity among groups who have very diverse experiences with market dislocations.

### **Market Dislocations and Single-Issue Politics**

In addition to the social structural and political limits on alliance formation discussed above, there are other challenges that arise from the specific ways in which neoliberalism distributes its dislocations across

this pre-existing social reality. I have argued that NAPM can best be seen as a Polanyian constituency of diverse social groups suffering from the manifold displacements of increased marketization. Mounting a coordinated response against neoliberalism would require uniting many groups who do not share similar relations to the means of production, but rather common displacement by market processes. However, uniting this latent constituency is complicated not only by the pre-existing political and economic antagonisms of class and caste, but by how different groups experience neoliberalism differently in their day-to-day lives. For example, in the West Bengal village of Nandigram, people have their homes and fields taken away for a Special Economic Zone (SEZ). In Medhiganj, U.P., and Plachimada, Kerala, Coca-Cola pumps out villagers' groundwater and releases toxic sludge onto their fields. In the *bastis* (slums) of Delhi and Bombay, people have their *jopar-pattis* (hutments) bulldozed for land speculators and middle-class housing. In other places, people lose homes and fields to dams, fisheries to large trawling vessels, or forests to timber contractors and conservation parks. The ways in which people experience the dislocations of the neoliberal onslaught are numerous, giving rise to a profusion of what David Harvey (1996) calls "militant particularisms." The challenge of seeing beyond these particularities and perceiving the commonality and systematicity underlying these variegated experiences is significant. This is exacerbated by the fact that the commodification of land in particular affects swaths of people scattered across rural areas and largely isolated from each other. Communication, sharing of experiences, and developing a sense of commonality is much more difficult than in labor movements, which involve greater concentrations of people in workplaces and are more often situated in urban industrial areas.

The end result is a proliferation of single-issue movements that are struggling to realize a comprehensive ideology and commit to a common political project. Even once movements have joined NAPM, their commitment to participate in a wider struggle can still be limited. Bemoaning this lack of a comprehensive commitment among NAPM's movements, one NAPM convener remarks:

Why are people joining NAPM? Because they are struggling for their survival. And, in that struggle, whosoever they feel is of use, support, they join that ... That doesn't mean that they have accepted the entire NAPM ideology. That is the problem. They are there as long as their agenda is being supported ... That's why the NAPM agenda, what happens? 'Hey, water.' Because water people should feel that I am in NAPM. 'Land, tribal.' We look and see, is anyone missing? Otherwise that organization will say, 'I have not a place in NAPM.' So, in order to accommodate everyone, to make everybody feel that 'I am a part of NAPM,' we make a very long memorandum. And it becomes non-focused. (Personal interview).

Thus, while NAPM accommodates a wide range of issues under its “frame,” reflecting the many ways in which groups are experiencing neoliberal globalization, it has been difficult to aggregate these issues into something more than the sum of the many parts. While the content of NAPM’s ideology explicitly connects all these different issues, commitment of constituent movements to put a lot of time and energy into a larger struggle beyond their specific issues has been lacking.

This diversity in the kinds of dislocations that neoliberalism engenders is accompanied by another characteristic which further impedes NAPM’s efforts to mount a strong national response: the degree and speed with which neoliberal globalization is happening and the overwhelming nature of the problems it is creating. Many of my respondents mentioned that one of the reasons for NAPM’s shortcomings was the failure of movement leaders to spend more time on national level action because they are immersed in their own struggles. This time and energy constraint is related to the degree of problems people are facing at the local level. Thus, an NAPM activist from Gujarat states, “Globalization is happening too fast, effects at the local level are so great that it’s difficult to mount a collective response. Groups are overwhelmed by the local issues they’re facing” (Personal interview). Another activist from Gujarat agreed that an “analysis of neoliberalism, a sense of common interest in solidarity is mostly limited to activists, not to [the] mass base. We have to keep in mind that people who are victims of these processes are busy struggling for their survival” (Personal interview). Thus, it is important to recognize the constraints on alliance building that are related to the nature and degree of the problem. If your slum has just been demolished and you are living in makeshift tents, or you can hardly feed your family because your means of subsistence have just been taken away from you, it will be quite difficult to think beyond your immediate survival.

This raises my final point, which is that building this kind of Polanyian constituency places a huge burden on activists to organizationally and ideologically tie together these disparate movements. Because of their social diversity, the variegated ways in which they experience neoliberalism, and their sheer geographical dispersion, a movement against the commodification of land entails a greater level of ideological, physical, and practical work than, say, labor movements that can organize more people in one place and are generally working with constituencies that at least have roughly similar relationships to the means of production. In its early days, NAPM was formed by a handful of movement leaders traveling across the country to bring more movements into the alliance. Throughout its history it has made abundant use of the Indian tradition of political *yatras* (tours/processions), using well-publicized tours across the subcontinent to

attract attention, participate in the struggles of local people, and relate these struggles to those of others across the country. NAPM has twice launched a *Desh Bachao, Desh Banao* (“save the country, build the country”) tour, in 1999 and 2003, that reached almost all states in India. On the way, movement leaders like Medha Patkar of the *Narmada Bachao Andolan*, Thomas Kocherry of the National Fishworkers Forum, and dozens of others would jump into local struggles, often participating in or helping to initiate protests with the usual arsenal of Gandhian weapons: marches, sit-ins, fasts, etc.

Medha Patkar’s frenetic itinerary in any given month could serve as a map of the most heated local struggles over neoliberal displacements in India. Typically, she has read everything about the struggle before she arrives. When she gets to a place she immediately meets with movement leaders. They discuss strategy, and by the next day a press conference and rally or protest action of some kind is planned. Patkar gives a speech, showing intimate and detailed knowledge of the local issue, linking it to the experiences of people struggling elsewhere, and calling for a larger national movement. She then fasts or otherwise participates in a protest if it is called for. If the police beat and arrest people, she gets beaten and arrested. In the process, her support heartens the local movement, and her notoriety attracts greater media and public attention to the issue if not some concrete success.

One of the many examples of this I witnessed was in the village of Medhiganj, Uttar Pradesh, in July 2006, where Patkar and other NAPM movements had come to lend support to the local struggle against a Coca-Cola factory that was consuming the village’s water supply. Hundreds of villagers were assembled around a dais set up across the street from the factory gates. Patkar discussed the local grievances against the plant, displaying intricate knowledge of the local situation and providing strategic advice. From there she brought in the story of villagers in Plachimada, Kerala, who had also been fighting a Coke factory with some success, and enumerated the lessons gained from that struggle. Then she talked about people struggling against large dams and the story became not just about Coke, but water privatization more generally. And, of course, water privatization is only one element of this larger onslaught of neoliberal globalization, which is dispossessing people across India of their land, forest, and water. In this way, Patkar builds the connections upwards to show the systematicity of the issues and repeatedly stresses the need for people to come together in a national movement to challenge them. This illustrates the kind of patient and time-consuming work required of organizers to connect dispersed local struggles into a larger political movement.

In the following exchange, Patkar reflected on the value of this kind of organizing in building the alliance:

ML: How do you bridge people from different parts of the country, different languages, different ideologies, women, Dalits, Adivasis? How do you create a common identity among such diverse groups?

MP: The moving around of some persons is always a must. I go to many places and really reach out, and wherever we go we take the message from different struggles there. And, in turn, their issue is raised. And, all that interaction is most valuable apart from the common meetings and all. Going out and supporting, I think that is one very strong force that is binding.

Yet, this kind of alliance organizing, involving continuous cross-country travel across the subcontinent in second-class trains, is time-consuming and exhausting, especially when one is already involved in a primary struggle, which all of NAPM's leaders are. As Patkar states, "Every time you go anywhere, so much of follow up, this and that, and sometimes it falls short of requirement. Physically it's not possible." The most consistent theme in my interviews with movement activists was the view that for NAPM to become stronger it had to have more movement leaders spending more of their time doing this kind of cross country organizing. Sandeep Pandey, convener of the Uttar Pradesh NAPM branch, expressed this common sentiment that NAPM can only become a national force if "the conveners not busy with their own struggles can spend more time going across the country and building connections with other struggles" (Personal interview). Yet, this lack of time clearly has a structural dimension. This organizational shortcoming, in addition to the sheer enormity of the problems people are facing, is in large part a product of the nature of the Polanyian constituency. Compared to a labor movement of the proletariat, for example, the greater social diversity and geographical dispersion of groups affected by the market, coupled with the less obvious connection between them, places a greater organizational and ideological burden on the organizers of a countermovement. If NAPM has so far not succeeded to the extent that it would wish, this is in part because of these social structural issues that are inherent to the constituency it is trying to organize.

NAPM's Action 2007 was the biggest attempt ever to overcome this inherent fragmentation of a Polanyian constituency. On one hand, the event confirmed the difficulty of moving from a collection of single-issue or locally-oriented movements to a more comprehensive platform. To begin with, the turnout was much lower than expected. A number of significant NAPM movements did not come because they were either too busy with their own struggles or did not prioritize a national level action that was not specifically focused on their particular issue. So, the turnout suggested a lack of total commitment to a comprehensive political project

by some constituent movements. Of those who did come, there was a significant, though by no means universal, trend of movements showing up just on the day that their issue was being addressed. Many Dalit activists came on the day that caste was being discussed; hawkers came on the day that informal labor was the issue, and so on. This issue-based fragmentation was also reflected in the protest's manifesto, which included an overwhelming 96 specific demands that even organizers couldn't keep track of.

On the other hand, there was still significant encouragement to be found in the diverse panoply of groups the action did bring together. Slum dwellers from Bombay, villagers resisting a Coke plant in UP, dam-displaced Adivasis from the Narmada Valley, farmers from Madhya Pradesh, and many others conversed about their issues and found some commonality in their respective difficulties. A protest on water issues in front of the Planning Commission brought together not only those resisting dams and water privatization, but also Dalit groups, farmers, and many others who wound up spending four days together in jail. A protest on SEZs a few days later also brought together mostly groups who were not themselves affected by SEZs. Crossover and mutual support can and did occur. There *is* willingness and capacity of groups to help each other out, even when their specific struggles appear distinct. But, building these solidarities is clearly difficult and slow-moving. The question, then, is how these potential solidarities can and should be most optimally organized.

### **Conclusion**

I have thus far argued that NAPM's attempt to create an alliance against neoliberalism can be fruitfully seen in Polanyian term as a contemporary "counter-movement" against market displacements. Polanyi helps us understand how NAPM's constituent movements emerge from variegated experiences with the market, not similar relationships to the means of production. However, Polanyi's theory of "the double-movement" falls woefully short of illuminating how such a countermovement is actually constructed or the obstacles it must overcome to be successful. Current theories of counter-hegemonic globalization have also not undertaken serious empirical research into the conditions of possibility for such an alliance between diverse groups affected in different ways by market dislocations. I have tried to show that the difficulties such an alliance must grapple with stem from the diverse collection of groups with variegated experiences of market displacement that a Polanyian constituency brings together.

Specifically, social structures of class and caste and the way they have shaped the political histories of its constituent movements have imposed constraints on NAPM's efforts to organize a coherent countermovement against neoliberalism. Some of these constraints are in the form of direct class antagonism, and others in the politics of caste domination. Issues like caste which are not reducible to market displacement also raise the question of whether an alliance like NAPM has to move beyond market politics and aspire to be a counter-hegemonic movement with even broader aspirations. Even without these complications, the Polanyian constituency NAPM is trying to organize already comes with inherent heterogeneity because of the vastly different ways in which groups are experiencing the dislocations of the market. It is hard to see the common cause beneath this diversity, especially when people are busy struggling for their own survival. The sheer geographical dispersion and isolation of these movements combined with these social structural divisions places a huge ideological and organizational burden on the activists that are trying to tie the movements together. The consequence is a profusion of single-issue movements who are finding it difficult to muster commitment and energy for a national-level political project.

Nevertheless, NAPM's efforts also demonstrate that such obstacles are not ironclad: it *has* had some success with cross-issue and, within limits, cross-class and caste collaboration. What NAPM has achieved so far in uniting several hundred movements from across the most diverse country on earth is nothing short of remarkable. In fact, it seems unprecedented among contemporary struggles against neoliberalism. The purpose of this analysis has not been to throw an intellectual wet blanket on the prospects for such movements. Rather, my intention has been to help theory catch up with movement practice by developing more fully the implications of the curious-looking alliances such as NAPM, which have emerged in recent years to oppose neoliberal globalization. My practical hope is that a better understanding of the obstacles facing such countermovements can, in the context of limited time and resources, highlight the kinds of alliances that are more or less difficult to build, and where the limits to solidarity might lie. Despite all of its difficulties and complications, if social movements hope to pose a comprehensive and systemic challenge to neoliberalism through a "deep re-embedding" of the market, they should not give up on the project of building more cohesive and comprehensive alliances.

But the most general conclusion regarding contemporary "double movements," though theoretically driven, is ultimately methodological: understanding the terrain on which alliances against neoliberalism can be built requires appreciating how the characteristics of a Polanyian constituency interact with the social structures and political

histories of particular countries. It is this conjuncture that is shaping the politics of social movement resistance to neoliberal globalization; and it is the political potential of this Polanyian “class on paper” that will ultimately determine the fate of “the liberal creed.”

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