Protesting on Behalf: Constructing Legitimacy in Water Movements

by

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ABSTRACT

Protest is a critical political tool for groups without secure access to water resources. The effectiveness of protest is largely dependent on the ability of groups to organize themselves and ensure that they are perceived as legitimate entities. The purpose of this study is to examine the ways in which intra-movement groups are organized and how they manage their legitimacy. The case of the Mahanadi River movement in Odisha, India is used to explore questions of identity, legitimacy, and representation in a fractured socio-political movement. Interview and observational data collected over a three-month period were coded for themes. Results show that Mahanadi River movement groups were organized factionally and spatially. Further, Mahanadi River movement groups managed their legitimacy using two related mechanisms: selective identity deployment and tokenism. These findings point to a trend in socio-political movements in which movement groups that are spatially, socially, and politically closer to centers of power tokenize the identities and experiences of their factional counterparts in order to boost their own legitimacy. In doing so, within-movement understandings of legitimacy are re-constructed, resulting in the subversion of tokenized groups' interests. This process renders protest, a critical political tool, useless to those groups who need it most. This paper concludes by suggesting ways in which the findings may be applied to broader socio-political movement contexts.

Mitra[1] wakes up at 5:30am in her tiny home in Kantilo village. She collects a small vase and walks 80 meters to the bank of the Mahanadi river to collect water for morning tea. After breakfast, Mitra carries her daughter and once again walks 80 meters to bathe in the river. The river is so muddy that she cannot see the bottom, even at the shallowest point. After bathing, she walks to the village store to purchase soap and potatoes and then settles down to prepare bidis (thin tobacco cigarettes). Mitra spends seven hours rolling bidis, inhaling their toxic gases. She will make around 20-30¢ with this batch.

In the mid-afternoon, Mitra's husband returns home from his street cleaning job. Like most men in the village, he had made a livelihood as a fisherman before the river began to dry up. It wasn't until he stopped fishing that Mitra was forced to roll bidis. Soon after, two rickshaws drive up the main street and a crowd gathers around. Four men dressed in white kurtas (shirts) step out, introduce themselves as leaders of the 'Save Mahanadi' movement, and state that they have traveled hundreds of kilometers to *teach the villagers how to fight for their right to clean water.*

The men in white gather in the village meeting space and invite village residents to join them in discussing their plans for an upcoming state-wide protest. Mitra recognizes one of the men from a newspaper article a few weeks ago. Her husband joins several other men as they file into the meeting, while Mitra and the other wives chat about the newcomers outside. Occasionally they peek into the closed meeting space through the narrow windows and watch the group of men. After an hour, Mitra returns to her home and begins to prepare dinner. Her husband returns soon after, stating that next week, Mitra will join the other ladies in the village in a jal satyagraha in Mahanadi river. She must memorize this chant: *Chhatisgarh Sarkar Husiaar; Mahanadi Paani Band Kale Chaliba Naahin; Shighra Amaku Paani Dia. Paani Na Dele Nian Jaliba* (Oh, Government of Chhattisgarh, be careful; It won't work if you stop the water of the Mahanadi; Give water as soon as possible. If you don't give water, there will be a fire of agitation)!

This anecdote is emblematic of the dynamics present in socio-political movements across the world. Several interesting questions arise from this brief story. For instance, how much weight does Mitra's voice carry in this movement? What about the voices of the four organizers? Whose interests are ultimately served by the movement outcomes? Finding the answers to these questions requires taking a closer look at the way legitimacy – defined here as work which is determined to be morally, socially, and politically valid by the broader community – is constructed and understood.

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[1] Names and identifying details have been changed to maintain anonymity.

Introduction

Organized water movements are generally a response to 'water scarcity'. Political ecologists have long asserted that such scarcity is a social construct (Johnston, 2003; Loftus, 2009; Swyngedouw, 2009) influenced by both biophysical conditions and human relationships (e.g. privileged access; see Rodriguez-Labajos & Martinez-Alier, 2015). Yet, restricted access to water resources remains a life-threatening reality to some. In cases of water insecurity, groups organize themselves to protest restrictions on water and secure access to this essential resource. The act of protest is critically important, especially for subaltern communities who may not have any other viable political recourse. However, the effectiveness of protest as a political tool varies widely and is dependent on the ability of groups to represent themselves as *legitimate entities* and – in the case of a large-scale effort including several different groups – ensure that their views are reflected in the broader movement.

Large-scale protest movements have become increasingly common around the globe over the past several years. Some suggest that this phenomenon denotes a shift in the way communities understand power and organize to pursue their interests (Youngs, 2017). Organizing is further complicated by within-movement power imbalances that preclude meaningful involvement for certain groups. The purpose of this study is to explore the ways in which people and groups organize themselves when they are unable to secure access to essential water resources.

This study is guided by two research questions: (1) how are intra-movement groups organized and (2) how do intra-movement groups manage their legitimacy? The paper is organized into four parts. I begin by reviewing two relevant bodies of literature and identifying major knowledge gaps. Next, I outline the study site and methodology used to address the research questions and display results. I conclude by arguing that intra-movement legitimacy is constructed spatially and factionally and discuss the value of these findings within the broader context of socio-political movements.

Literature Review

Two bodies of literature were examined to understand (a) the ways in which intra-movement groups are organized and (b) how they manage their legitimacy. Literature on factionalism in socio-political movements identifies causal factors of factionalism and its effects at the movement level (i.e. on the trajectory of the movement as a whole). Work on spatiality of power and protest focuses on place-based identity and the spatial-embeddedness of power in the context of socio-political movements. Given the pervasive nature of factionalism and spatially-embedded power relations in protest movement contexts, familiarity with these topics is critical to understanding how movements are organized and legitimacy constructed.

Factionalism in socio-political movements

Factionalism is extremely common in social-political movements (Balser, 1997). The term 'factionalism' has been understood in various ways, and this study borrows from political science definitions of factionalism as within-party groups, more or less organized, based on shared identity and purposes (Boucek, 2009). Literature on socio-political movements – including work the U.S. civil rights and nuclear disarmament movements, Communist movements in Myanmar and Nepal, and China's Red Guard movement – identifies factors contributing to factionalism and examines the effects of factionalism on movement-level legitimacy.

Relevant work highlights factors both internal and external to movements resulting in factionalism. Regarding the former, some scholars have argued that movements exist in a "world of natural friends and enemies whose role is dictated by ideology rather than by shifting interests (Schwartz, 1994)". Thus, factions may form when movement subgroups differ ideologically (Schwartz, 2002). Ideological differences often stem from disagreements over the structure or approach of the movement and may devolve into conflict, altering the trajectory of the movement (see Fig. 1). Further, social and political identities create lines of fissure. Curtis and Zurcher (1973) situate movements within 'multi-organizational fields' in which stakeholder groups unified under a common goal factionalize based on divergent political and social

interests. In the same vein, factions may arise when one or more subgroups feel excluded from the 'inner core'. Such conflicts often stem from identity related issues (i.e. race or class-based) rather than ideological or tactical differences (Polletta and Kretschmer, 2015).
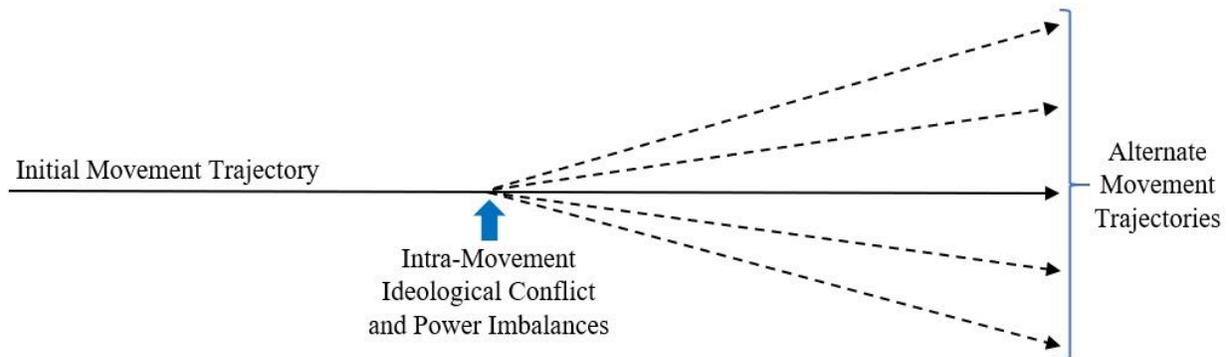
Figure 1. Diagram of the effect of factionalism on movement trajectory

The emergence of factions occurs not only internally, but also as a result of external factors (Polletta and Kretschmer, 2015). Movement groups often interact with groups from other movements, resulting in further factionalism due to the introduction of foreign – and potentially threatening – perspectives (Echols, 1989). The Communist movement in Myanmar (formerly Burma) demonstrates the significant roles of colonialism and political shifts in factionalism. This movement – concurrent with the Burma independence movement – began with the subversion of the communists' position in the Anti-Fascist People's Freedom League (AFPFL) by the British (Taylor, 1983). Resulting ideological disputes between leaders of the Burma Communist party eventually led to the emergence of factions. Further, Khadka's (1995) work on the Communist movement in Nepal highlights the influence of international politics – i.e. Chinese communism and India's dismissal of Nepal's first democratically-elected Congress – on factionalism. Factions are embedded in identity struggles and reflected in geopolitical conflict over time (Khadka, 1995).

Some work highlights the interconnectedness of internal and external factors, focusing on within-movement challenges posed by national issues (i.e. cultural complexity, social identity, political history). For instance, the Nepali Communist movement splintered along caste lines as groups grappled with the role of caste identity in the movement within a historically identity-

based hierarchical framework. Specifically, historically exploited lower caste groups felt as though the Communist leadership – provided by the two uppermost castes – posed obstacles to the movement's stance against religious or sectarian creeds (Khadka, 1995). Walder's (2006) work on China's Red Guard Movement points to the influence of highly consequential individual choices made within (a) an ambiguous, ever-shifting political context and (b) complex power structures on factionalism.

Discussions of factionalism generally conceptualize group boundary permeability as a continuum. Completely open or totally closed access to movement groups is extremely rare (Wright, 1997). Rather, factions tend to operate in between these dichotomous states, allowing access to some and systematically restricting access for others (Wright & Taylor, 1998; Pettigrew & Martin, 1987). In cases of extreme group boundary restrictions, *tokenism* – defined by Cloud (1996) as an individual representing a larger group whose difference is politicized to meet a given end – may occur. In the context of socio-political movements, Wright (1997) demonstrated the influence of tokenism on intergroup perceptions of legitimacy.

Factionalism affects legitimacy at the movement level. That is, the presence of factions has been shown to either increase or decrease the legitimacy of the movement *as a whole*. For instance, the presence of factions may increase the legitimacy of the movement by expanding the network of supporters through factional mobilization. Factions can draw upon their diverse support bases to rally support for the broader cause. On the other hand, infighting among factions may undermine the legitimacy of the movement by communicating to supporters that the organization is conflicted and thus not worth supporting (Benford, 1993). Per Polletta and Kritschmer (2015), legitimacy is perceived and understood based on signals from outside the group. For instance, media misrepresentation and reporter bias toward movement infighting may affect the movement's portrayal as a legitimate political actor (Rohlinger, 2006). Further, access to politically and socially-powerful groups (e.g. funders, legal support, politicians) can be an indicator of legitimacy among movement factions (Bevington, 2009). Interactions with such 'elite' entities shape group stances, affecting the trajectory of the movement. Specifically, groups with access to the 'elite' tend to take on moderate stances for fear of alienating their connections.

Existing work on factionalism in socio-political movement contexts focuses largely on political history, causal factors, and the impacts of factionalism on movement-level legitimacy. This work lays a strong foundation for this study, which highlights the complex process of legitimacy construction *within* a socio-political movement. Because the causal factors of factionalism are often place-based, factional dynamics are further complicated by the spatial-embeddedness of identity and power in protest movements.

Spatiality of power and protest

To fully understand the ways in which intra-movement groups are organized, it is critical to examine the ways in which protest movements are embedded in space (Jansen, 2001). Literature on the spatiality of power and protest focuses on (1) place-based identity and (2) the spatial-embeddedness of power. Protest movements do not exist in socio-political vacuums, and spatially-embedded power relations play a significant role in the organization of movement groups (Koopmans, 2004).

Regarding the former, Larsen (2008) conceptualizes place as a political tool which can be used to either navigate or exploit differences to a given end. Specifically, Larsen uses the case of northern British Columbia to illustrate the politicization of 'place' by movement leaders as a means of constructing collective identity against external threats (Larsen, 2003). Constructed collective identity is manifested in instances of otherwise-unrelated social groups banding together to resist action by an external group. Larsen provides the example of local communities and environmentalists using the idea of 'place' to work across ideological differences and create a common front against a shared external threat (i.e. hydroelectric dam developers). The coalition successfully pushed the anti-dam movement forward, but was ultimately disbanded when the shared threat disappeared, value differences resurfaced, and conflict ensued (Larsen, 2008).

Woods (2003) expands on this idea by highlighting the intersectional nature of place-based politics. Boundaries between social movements are impossible to determine, thus groups with multiple salient sub-identities may be positioned within the scope of multiple social

movements (e.g. black farmers' organizations in the U.S.). Movement trajectories are shaped by the aspects of culture and lifestyle deemed essential to these place-based, intersectional sub-identities (Woods, 2003). However, intra-movement power imbalances reshape movement-level trajectories (see Fig. 1), as demonstrated by Woods' example of the concurrent rise of U.S. capitalist agriculture and internal-external political divisions in the 1920's. Soon after, rural interests began to be externally represented by nationally-recognized 'elite' groups, whose self-serving actions reshaped the rural landscape.

Regarding the spatiality of urban movements, Jansen (2001) uses the case of the Serbian anti-Milosevic movement to demonstrate how protests are embedded in urban space. Specifically, Jansen notes the concentration of dominant political institutions in urban space, and how the physical exclusion of demonstrators resulted in transgressions of spatial-political boundaries via the "symbolic re-claiming of space". For instance, when protesters were not allowed to enter the regime's buildings, they would move to places laden with symbolic meaning such as the Milosevic-controlled media buildings (Jansen, 2001).

Enhanced understanding of the spatiality of protest movements requires familiarity with the concept of power. Power can be understood as something that exists in one or more modalities (e.g. authority, manipulation) which, in turn, have distinct spatialities (Allen, 2003). Several authors highlight the spatial-embeddedness of power (Melucci, 1989; Routledge, 1993, 1996; Sharp et al., 2000), emphasizing the inability of humans to detach themselves from ever-present power relations. Bridging ideas of factionalism and the spatiality of protest, Corbridge (1992) highlights the prevalence of localized, place-specific factions in contemporary social movements. Subasic et al. (2008) explores the ways in which groups with high status interact with low-status groups. The authors assert that whereas low-status groups typically challenge the authority of high-status groups, high-status group members may act in political solidarity with low-status groups in ways that embody relevant norms and values.

Cohen (1996) highlights Alain Touraine's identity-orientated theory, which aims to explain how groups (i.e. 'collective actors') construct their identities and navigate complex systems of political legitimacy. Routledge (1996) introduces the idea of 'terrains of resistance'

to refer to "sites of contestation and the multiplicity of relations between hegemonic and counter-hegemonic powers and discourses." Within this framework, ideological, political, and cultural expressions imbue space with meaning, creating both the physical and representational space within which a conflict takes place.

Existing literature provides a thorough understanding of how legitimacy is constructed and understood at the movement level. However, understanding the complex dynamics of socio-political movements requires moving beyond movement-level analyses of legitimacy construction. Using the case of the Mahanadi River movement in Odisha, India, this study applies relevant ideas from literature on factionalism in socio-political movements and the spatiality of power and protest to investigate intra-movement construction and perceptions of legitimacy.

Study Site

In India, there has been a proliferation of organized environmental movements over the past few decades (Swain, 1997). These movements span a broad range of environmental issues from government exploitation of forest resources to dam-related displacement and seem to involve people across all social strata. A popular subset of environmental movements in India has been related to the protection of – and access to – river resources. Several movements linked to major Indian rivers have emerged, most notably Narmada Bachao Andolan ('Save Narmada Movement'; NBA) in the early 1990's. NBA leaders rallied farmers, environmentalists, and *Adivasis* (an indigenous group) to participate in hunger strikes and peaceful marches to halt construction of a large dam project: the Sardar Sarovar dam (Gadgil and Guha, 1994). The movement was ultimately unsuccessful, as the Supreme Court decided in 2000 that dam construction would continue without delay, albeit with additional considerations regarding environmental impacts and displaced communities (John, 2001). However, NBA has remained an emblem of a 'peoples' movement', and several river movements (e.g. Yamuna Bachao Andolan, People Against Polavaram Project [PAPP]) have imitated NBA's approach with varying degrees of success. The most recent of such movements is the Mahanadi River movement in Odisha, India.

The Mahanadi River movement in Odisha, India provides a rich context in which to investigate (1) how intra-movement groups are organized and (2) how intra-movement groups manage their legitimacy. Odisha state itself has a long, rich history of water conflict and related protest movements. Over the past few years, the Mahanadi River movement has become heavily politicized and factionalized. Odia identity varies widely across the state and is closely tied with geography and space. Odisha's distinct spatiality and acute power imbalances are deeply embedded in the Mahanadi River movement's structure and organization. These factors render the Mahanadi River movement a rich case study for intra-movement legitimacy construction.

The geographic context

Odisha, India (see Fig. 2) is an eastern Indian state situated between the Bay of Bengal and the states of West Bengal, Jharkhand, Andhra Pradesh, and Chhattisgarh. The Mahanadi river – translated from Sanskrit words 'maha' (Great) and 'nadi' (river) – originates in Chhattisgarh state and flows over 850 kilometers through Odisha before draining into the Bay of Bengal. It is the sixth largest river system in India (Behera, 2008). Mahanadi river flows directly through 15 of Odisha's 30 districts and is commonly referred to as the 'Sorrow of Odisha' due to its long history of

Figure 2. Map of India with Odisha state highlighted in pink. Adapted from www.mapsofindia.com

devastating floods. Particularly severe floods occurred in 2003, 2008, 2011, and 2013 (Beura, 2015), causing deaths and severe property damage (Mohanty et al., 2008). The state has a tropical climate with medium to high rainfall, though actual rainfall varies by district (Panda, 2017). Given the state's water resources and proximity to the Bay of Bengal, it has become a major destination for industrial activity (Mishra & Maitra, 2006; Nayak, 2007).

Odisha's major cities (Bhubaneswar, Cuttack, Puri, and Berhampur) are concentrated in coastal districts. Urbanization in inland districts has been slower, though one of Odisha's oldest cities – Sambalpur – is in the western part of the state. Sambalpur is the residential hub for the rapidly industrializing district in which it is located (Panda et al., 2016).

The socio-political context

The state capital, Bhubaneswar, is home to the Odisha Legislative Assembly, Secretariat, and state government administrative units. Another coastal city, Cuttack, houses the Odisha High Court. These decision-making, regulatory, and judicial bodies are responsible for creating, implementing, and enforcing state-wide water policy. Members of the Legislative Assembly are

elected every five years; the last election occurred in 2014. Odia politicians and bureaucrats are commonly accused of being self-serving and non-transparent.

Odisha's most prevalent livelihood activities include agriculture, livestock rearing, and collecting non-timber forest products (NTFPs) (Lakerveld et al., 2015). Agriculture is by far the largest sector of the Odisha economy, providing employment to more than 70% of the Odia population (Paltasingh & Goyari, 2013). Odisha's two major crops, rice and maize, are extremely water-intensive (Das, 2012). Agricultural productivity varies by district and over time, however farming livelihoods are generally associated with western Odisha.

Approximately 47% of Odisha's population is below the poverty line (Ghosh et al., 2012). The Odia government, overseeing a mineral-rich and water-rich state which provides raw materials to the national market, has legitimized extraction-based industrialization by perpetuating a development-based narrative (Kumar, 2014). As such, Odia communities have shouldered the costs associated with resource exploitation without receiving any benefits. As victims of the 'resource curse' (Le Billon, 2005), many Odia communities have organized themselves to demand their right to access Odisha's natural resources.

History of the Mahanadi River movement

In 1946, the Odisha government announced plans to construct a dam near Hirakud township on the Mahanadi river in order to decrease the detrimental effects of flooding on the state economy. The first notice for acquisition of land spanning 95 villages in 1946 was met by immediate organized resistance (referred to locally as 'agitation') by river-dependent inland communities. The overwhelming sentiment of agitators was antagonism towards coastal communities who would reap benefits from the dam without shouldering any of the costs borne by the inland communities (Nayak, 2010). However, resistance was politically weak and became quickly overshadowed by the then-pervasive rhetoric of national building.

Hirakud dam construction was inaugurated in 1948 and completed in 1957. Throughout the construction process, around 280 villages were submerged, and residents forced to relocate

(Baboo, 1991). Agitation continued after project completion, and the primary focus shifted from dam construction to (a) inadequate relocation compensation and (b) diversion of reservoir water from agriculture to industry. It was during this time that organized agitation groups such as Paschim Odisha Krushak Samanwayan Samiti ('Western Odisha Farmers Coordination Committee') emerged in inland Odisha. Drawing from Gandhian *satyagraha* – a technique of nonviolent political movement (Rai, 2000) – these groups employed various protest tactics such as peaceful marches and sit-ins (Baboo, 2009). Such demonstrations often led to conflict between agitators and Odisha state authorities, typically resulting in arrests of protest leaders by police officers (Nayak, 2010). Groups continued to demand fair compensation for displaced communities through the 2000's, with reports claiming that 10,000 out of 26,561 families had still not received compensation in 2014 (Nayak, 2010).

More recently, a dispute over Mahanadi river between Chhattisgarh and Odisha has caused a proliferations of protest events across Odisha state. In 2016, the Odisha government accused Chhattisgarh of illegally constructing small dam projects upstream, restricting river flow and causing *water scarcity* for downstream Odia communities. The groups involved in this conflict represent a cross-section of Odia society and include both long-standing water activist groups such as Paschim Odisha and newcomers. One notable new group is Mahanadi Bachao Andolan (MBA). This group, led by a small subgroup of male politicians from Bhubaneswar, has been covered extensively by Odia media and utilizes anti-Chhattisgarh rhetoric to rally support. All groups claim to be advancing the movement's goal of 'saving Mahanadi river' from water scarcity and use similar protest tactics – most commonly, *jal satyagraha*: the act of immersing one's body waist-deep into water in protest. However, the heavily-politicized nature of the current conflict has brought deep-seated antagonism and distrust to the fore and claims of legitimacy (or lack thereof) have been utilized within the movement to the benefit of some factions and the detriment of others. I used several methods to explore how such claims of legitimacy are constructed and understood in the context of the Mahanadi River movement.

Methods

Data collection

  I collected data over a three month-long field work trip with the help of a local research assistant. I hired the research assistant upon arrival to the field site and ensured that the assistant was fluent in Odia language, could understand a handful of Odia dialects, and could effectively translate between Odia and English. Though I am also fluent in Odia, hiring a local research assistant was critically important (a) to compare understandings of phrases spoken in dialect, (b) validate translations of interview data, and (c) navigate complex relational dynamics in certain areas of the field site.

  In order to explore (1) how intra-movement groups are organized and (2) how intra-movement groups manage their legitimacy, I used a combination of key informant interviews, focus groups, traveling observations, and meeting observations (see Fig. 3). Data were collected using the snowball sampling method in seven districts – Jharsuguda, Bargarh, Sambalpur, Angul, Nayagarh, Cuttack, and Khordha (see Fig. 4) – situated along the Mahanadi river, running eastward from inland to coastal communities.

Figure 3. Distribution of three types of data collected

Districts were chosen either because they were sites of major Mahanadi River movement events or because the sampling method required travel to another district. Interviewees are relatively evenly distributed across occupation, gender, and space (see Table 1). This cross-cutting sample allows for a deeper, more nuanced understanding of the complex role of identity and spatiality in legitimacy construction.
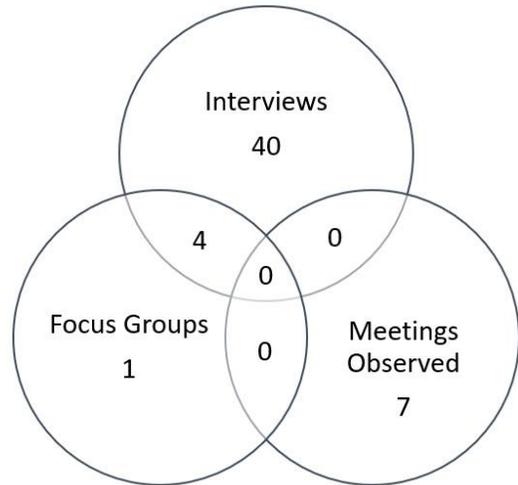
Figure 4. Map of Odisha state highlighting the districts in which data were collected (red). Adapted from www.mapsofindia.com.

Gender	Male				Female		TOTAL
	32 (73%)				12 (27%)		44 (100%)
Setting	Urban				Rural		
	23 (52%)				21 (48%)		44 (100%)
Engagement Type	Movement Leader	Protester	Politician	Media	Engineer	NGO	
	7 [2] (16%)	17 (39%)	4 [2] (10%)	5 (11%)	3 (7%)	10 (23%)	44
Number of duplicate listings listed in brackets							

Table 1. Distribution of interviewees across identity and space

Forty-four key informant interviews were conducted, averaging 1.25 hours each and covering several topics including social and group identity, utilitarian and sociocultural values associated with the river, engagement in the river movement, and perceptions of major protest groups. Majority of respondents were men (n=32; see Table 1), due in part to the fact that movement leadership is predominantly male. Only two of the women interviewed identified themselves as leaders of a group.

Interviews conducted in urban areas were typically one-on-one meetings in a comfortable (i.e. air conditioned, chairs) setting. Thus, there were relatively few distractions or breaks. In

rural settings (i.e. villages), most interviews took place outdoors, in common meeting areas or in front of a respondent's home. Some rural meetings shifted between individual interviews and focus groups (see Fig. 3), as additional community members would join in and leave throughout the process. In such cases, transcripts differentiated the additional interviewees from the primary respondent. Further, given the extreme heat, many rural interviews were filled with short breaks as respondents left to replenish their water. Finally, interview data varied by gender. The differences were particularly salient in rural settings. Whereas men were able to freely respond to interview questions, many women chose to be accompanied by a male counterpart. In some cases, when women were unable to respond to a question, the man would interject. This dynamic undoubtedly affected the integrity of the data collected and was accounted for in the analysis.

Observations made during travel were recorded in a field notebook and used during the analysis to provide context and corroborate findings. For instance, power imbalances between interviewees that were never articulated but nonetheless important were included in the field notebook to ensure that such nuances were accurately reflected in data analysis. Observational data were also collected from movement organizing meetings in both urban and rural settings. Meetings were attended by invitation only and restricted to observation (i.e. no participation). The meetings averaged 1.5 hours each and notes were taken in a field notebook. Notes focused on communication, power dynamics, logistics and the planning process, and perceptions of outgroups. Like interviews, the type of observational data collected varied by setting. Meetings observed in urban settings were often attended by journalists and photographers, whereas meetings in rural settings did not attract as much media attention. As a result, urban meetings tended to take on 'press conference' formats as opposed to the group dialogue format seen in rural settings.

Data analysis

Majority of key informant interviews and focus groups were voice recorded and immediately transcribed. Interviews conducted in Odia, an Odia dialect, or a combination of English and Odia were transcribed and cross-checked by the research assistant for accuracy.

Two interviewees did not consent to voice recording requests, and inflated notes were used in lieu of a verbatim script. An initial set of key themes was identified based on field observations. Key themes shifted and sub-themes emerged through the process of coding transcripts and inflated notes (see Table 2).

THEME	SUB-THEME(S)
AGITATION	Communication; Factions; Leadership; Legitimacy; Logistics; Motivation; Outcomes; Planning; Risk
CASTE	
GENDER	Affected; Culture; Essentialism; Leadership; Livelihood; Participation; Usage
GEOGRAPHY	Basin; CoastalInland; Essentialism; Interstate; UrbanRural
HIRAKUD	Displacement; Industry
INDUSTRY	
INTERSECTORAL	
NARRATIVE	Hidden
POLITICS	Apolitical; Communication; Partisan; Politicization
RIVER	Affected; Culture; Livelihood; Ownership; Rights; Usage
TOKENISM	

Table 2. Themes and Sub-theme(s) used during data analysis

<center>**Results**</center>

This section is organized into four parts. I begin by demonstrating the two ways in which Mahanadi River movement groups are organized. First, I highlight evidence of factionalism within the movement and characterize the three major factions. Next, I provide evidence of the salience of place-based identity and spatially-embedded essentialism in intra-movement organizing. Regarding the ways in which Mahanadi River movement groups manage their legitimacy, I highlight two mechanisms. I start by outlining the process of selective identity deployment within the movement. I conclude this section by highlighting assertions of tokenism within the Mahanadi River movement.

<u>The organization of intra-movement groups</u>

How are intra-movement groups organized? Based on data collected in the field, Mahanadi River movement groups are organized in two predominant ways: factionally and spatially.

i. Factionalism in the Mahanadi River movement

Supporters of the Mahanadi river movement are united in their vision of saving the river. Over the past few years, the movement has split into several factions, each with different ideologies and approaches. As the Mahanadi conflict began to be politicized, three major factions emerged: Paschim Odisha, Water Initiatives Odisha (WIO), and Mahanadi Bachao Andolan (MBA) (see Fig. 5). One environmental NGO employee from a coastal district described factionalism within the Mahanadi River movement as follows:

> "Sometimes there are turf wars among the civil society groups also. And I have seen this much more seriously in Odisha. I have been working in Maharashtra and things - but lot of people are working on water issues, but there are lot of ego issues here. It's not a difference in perspective or other type of thing, but who takes the lead, where are you located? There are mutual suspicions. So because of that, there are conflicts and fractured type of thing among civil society."

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As demonstrated in Figure 5, these groups vary by primary concerns, stated and perceived motivations, geographic concentration, and legitimacy (or lack thereof) afforded by other factions. The characterizations outlined in this figure are based on observational data and interviewee perceptions of Mahanadi River movement groups.

Group	Primary Concern(s)	Stated Motivation(s)	(Externally-Perceived) Legitimacy	Location
Mahanadi Bachao Andolan ('Save Mahanadi')	Inter-State Conflict	Odisha state's economic, social, and political well-being; **Apolitical**	Low: Politically-sponsored movement with no legitimate concern for the river or its dependents	Coastal
Water Initiatives Odisha	Ecology; Hydrology; Sustainability	Objectivity; Facts; Science; **Apolitical**	High: Science-based claims → Objectivity	State-wide (dispersed)
Paschim Odisha Krushak Samanwayan Samiti ('Western Odisha Farmers Coordination Committee')	Farmers' Interests; Agriculture vs. Industry	Farmers' well-being; Anti-Industry	High: Lived experiences; Affected communities	Inland

Figure 5. The primary concern(s), location, stated and perceived motivations, and legitimacy of three major factions in the Mahanadi River movement

Differences in magnitude of livelihood stakes associated with the Mahanadi River movement have contributed to factionalism. Paschim Odisha consists mainly of inland farming and fishing communities whose livelihoods are based – directly or indirectly – on the Mahanadi river. As such, these communities have extraordinarily high stakes in the outcome of any decision regarding the river. Several interviewees spoke about the high livelihood stakes of the communities represented by Paschim Odisha:

"The condition of our fishermen is very critical due to the dried river. It so happened in the summer season that we did not get even a handful of water to drink! We did not get drinking water. The depth of our well is 33 feet. It dried up. We did not get water from the well. There are no fish in the river. Our livelihood is only to catch fish. Due to the scarcity of fish, our community brothers lost their livelihood. In order to manage their families, they are going to Gujrat, Surat, Kerala and even to Tamil Nadu. We pray that if the Central Government as well as the Government of Odisha gives any encouragement or

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help to our fishermen community then they will stay near their residences, otherwise they will leave the place with the whole family."

-Village president, inland district

"There are thousands of fishermen, those who are dependent on Mahanadi, they have lost their livelihood. And now the time has come the government must come up with alternative livelihood for them. These are the things that needs to be done for the protection of the river and the people who are dependent on it."

-Mahanadi Bachao Andolan leader, coastal district

Paschim Odisha also has a long history of political engagement and activism in the area, specifically regarding allocation of Mahanadi river resources and involuntary displacement of village communities following the construction of the Hirakud dam. Several interviewees spoke about the Hirakud dam protests organized by Paschim Odisha with reverence:

"Hirakud conflict came to picture by some farmer groups who were earlier demanding fair price. So there were group existing… in Odisha, there are groups [Paschim Odisha] these people have worked around land and social movements. Odisha has a history of social movements around land. Odisha has a history of environmental movement kind of thing around forest rights. So these groups find it easy to connect to the water rights space."

-NGO Employee, coastal district

"30,000 people. Then, they marched for 5 kilometres – from Jagannath temple to Jawahar Minnar. That was a historical mass. 30,000 means… The biggest thing was that people came but how to control them? They had set up barricades. Who? The district administration, police."

-Paschim Odisha leader, inland district

MBA has emerged over the past few years following the announcement of upstream dam construction by Chhattisgarh. This group consists primarily of politicians and bureaucrats. MBA's day-to-day operations (i.e. planning meetings, press conferences) occur in the coastal city of Bhubaneswar. Exceptions include occasional visits to inland communities to coordinate protest events. Given the concentration of agricultural and fishing activity in the west part of the state, MBA's work is relatively detached from the high livelihood stakes associated with groups

like Paschim Odisha. Notably, there is a large discrepancy between MBA's stated and externally perceived motivations (see Fig. 6).

Group	Primary Concern(s)	Stated Motivation(s)	(Externally-Perceived) Legitimacy	Location
Mahanadi Bachao Andolan ('Save Mahanadi')	Inter-State Conflict	Odisha state's economic, social, and political well-being; **Apolitical**	Low: Politically-sponsored movement with no legitimate concern for the river or its dependents	Coastal
Water Initiatives Odisha	Ecology; Hydrology; Sustainability	Objectivity; Facts; Science; **Apolitical**	High: Science-based claims → Objectivity	State-wide (dispersed)
Paschim Odisha Krushak Samanwayan Samiti ('Western Odisha Farmers Coordination Committee')	Farmers' Interests; Agriculture vs. Industry	Farmers' well-being; Anti-Industry	High: Lived experiences; Affected communities	Inland

Figure 6. Stated versus perceived motivations of Mahanadi Bachao Andolan

MBA leaders are staunch in their assertions that their interest in the Mahanadi River movement is 'apolitical', as shown in the quotes below:

"When people come into politics, they are thinking that 'I will extract something else'. So, that's why when I joined this I saw that there are so many this type of people were there. So we started the activism work. Politics is the secondary part, then I started the activism work. So we help people, help the communities, help the villagers"

-*Mahanadi Bachao Andolan leader, coastal district*

"This is a movement called 'apolitical'. Not political movement has been started. So everybody they are supporting. Even government to some extent supported us, so there is no affair... We are in a simple way."

-*Mahanadi Bachao Andolan leader, coastal district*

"[MBA] wants to tell people that we are only being pressurized by civil society, we are not acting on our own. The civil society is pressuring us to act this way. So they want some civil society to toe their line of thinking."

-*Writer, inland district*

However, other factions and most of general society maintain that MBA is a politically-sponsored group that lacks genuine concern for the river-dependent communities that it claims to be protesting for:

"Actually, political people have taken their – this movement in their way… Neither government, neither the political people, they are responsible for usage of the Mahanadi. They are responsible for usage of water to industries."

-Paschim Odisha leader, inland district

"The elitist groups, who are always nearer to the power, they would always try to please the government. So in Odisha, some of these new – to be specific this Mahanadi Andolan – my observation about this group is that they are a government-sponsored group. So what happens is the government cannot make, go to the public by making everything political. So it has to find a scapegoat which does the job for it."

-Water Initiatives Odisha leader, coastal district

Meanwhile, WIO is a research and advocacy organization whose interest in the Mahanadi River began several decades ago, at the height of the Hirakud dam controversy. In light of the recent politicization of the Mahanadi River movement, WIO has expanded its network of writers, scientist, and NGOs and published pieces urging a shift in focus from politicized conflict to 'apolitical' concerns such as ecology and sustainability:

"They are non-political groups… This group actually wants to involve people from both Odisha and Chhattisgarh for a solution which makes the river sustainable, which protects the river. Their theory is it's not Odisha versus Chhattisgarh. Their theory is life of a river is at stake, there has to be a combined strategy among all stakeholders so that the river lives long, and if the river survives then only you can use the river."

-Times of India reporter, coastal district

"But our fight is for the river, for the entire civilization. What we say is river is not your part or their part. Ok, geographically you have divided, but then the river is not divided, it doesn't have a boundary. It's a complete river basin. And you have to work in you know harmony, you have to work in integrated approach, you have to actually care for the river."

"An… issue is the whole question of environmental flow nobody talks about. And water pollution… We did some preliminary research on water quality issues and we found extremely, you know even presence of heavy metals and other type of things as a, you know water sample we got tested and things. So some of the substantive issues are not coming into the debate or discourse around this whole conflict."

-NGO Employee, coastal district

ii. Spatiality in the Mahanadi River movement

Mahanadi River movement groups are also organized spatially. The social and political fabric of Odisha state varies widely by space. Different parts of Odisha state have taken on different identities. Differences are most salient along the 'upstream-downstream' and 'inland-coastal' divide (see Fig. 7). These two classifications were used by interviewees to describe the same collections of communities.

Group	Primary Concern(s)	Stated Motivation(s)	(Externally-Perceived) Legitimacy	Location
Mahanadi Bachao Andolan ('Save Mahanadi')	Inter-State Conflict	Odisha state's economic, social, and political well-being; **Apolitical**	Low: Politically-sponsored movement with no legitimate concern for the river or its dependents	Coastal
Water Initiatives Odisha	Ecology; Hydrology; Sustainability	Objectivity; Facts; Science; **Apolitical**	High: Science-based claims → Objectivity	State-wide (dispersed)
Paschim Odisha Krushak Samanwayan Samiti ('Western Odisha Farmers Coordination Committee')	Farmers' Interests; Agriculture vs. Industry	Farmers' well-being; Anti-Industry	High: Lived experiences; Affected communities	Inland

Figure 7. Place-based identities of Mahanadi River movement factions

Generally, poor, river-dependent 'upstream' or 'inland' communities are perceived to be victims of exploitation by 'downstream' or 'coastal' actors, as demonstrated by the following excerpts:

> "Maximum revenue is being collected from this part; and the revenue are invested in the coastal belt. So the enmity between the western part and eastern part is old, age-old war."
>
> *-Paschim Odisha member, inland district*

> "The conflict that is going on between Chhattisgarh and Odisha, innocent people become the victim of it. Do you get it? If we had restricted for them this water 18 years ago… had they restricted since the day they started the [dam] project, crores of rupees would not have been spent from the Treasury of the Government of Odisha. That money is spent from the pockets of the poor people. The innocent people are facing great trouble!"
>
> *-Journalist, inland district*

> "In Odisha, we have two distinct parts: one is coastal and one is western part… There is always a comparison between western and coastal. There is a coastal-western feeling also. So people of western Odisha feel that they [coastal] are getting most of the benefits, whereas we [inland] have the resources."
>
> *-Writer, inland district*

Some attribute the exploitative nature of the inland-coastal relationship to the elitist disinterest of coastal groups and essential simplicity and vulnerability of inland communities, as demonstrated by the quotes below:

> "There is much exploitation. Cuttack, Bhubaneswar, Jagatsinghpur, Jajpur – all coastal belts. Technically our people are very simple people and straightforward people. They [coastal] are a little bit brainy people."
>
> *-Paschim Odisha leader, inland district*

> "….and what they do – they slowly acquire land very cheap rate and become landlords. This happens. And due to innocent nature of people of this area, they easily get swayed away by their sweet talks."
>
> *-Paschim Odisha member, inland district*

Other interviewees discussed how place-based identities are embodied by Mahanadi River movement groups. As described earlier, Paschim Odisha has a long history of activism in inland communities. Its current work is still concentrated in these communities, and as such, the group itself is often seen as vulnerable to exploitation by its coastal counterparts. On the other

hand, while MBA claims to represent the interests of Odia society at large, its operations are typically concentrated in coastal cities. Notions of coastal elitist disinterest, exploitation, and duplicity are attached to this movement group. For instance, one NGO employee from an inland district described their perception of MBA's motivations:

"I think [MBA] has own agenda to be part of this game. So now it has become a, see this has become a political thing. So if I make a fight, I make a agenda, I might get a political ticket for this next election which is coming in next to next year. So everybody has their own personal agenda… Really sad."

As demonstrated, power imbalances are latent in the factional and spatial organization of the Mahanadi River movement. The next sub-section highlights the ways in which groups leverage parts of their identities and navigate spatially-embedded power relations to maintain their own legitimacy.

Legitimacy management among intra-movement groups

How do intra-movement groups construct and manage their legitimacy? In the context of the Mahanadi River movement, groups construct and manage legitimacy using two mechanisms: selective identity deployment and tokenism.

i. Selective identity deployment by Mahanadi River movement groups

Movements are embedded in – among several other factors – shared social identity (Polletta and Kretschmer, 2015). In the case of the Mahanadi River movement, groups contain several intersectional social identities (i.e. geographic location, political clout, resources, history of activism; see Fig. 5). In the context of water activism, some identities are more legitimizing than others. Groups tended to emphasize only those identities which enhanced their legitimacy. This was demonstrated through interviewees' statements about their groups' motivations (see Fig. 8).

Group	Primary Concern(s)	Stated Motivation(s)	(Externally-Perceived) Legitimacy	Location
Mahanadi Bachao Andolan ('Save Mahanadi')	Inter-State Conflict	Odisha state's economic, social, and political well-being; **Apolitical**	Low: Politically-sponsored movement with no legitimate concern for the river or its dependents	Coastal
Water Initiatives Odisha	Ecology; Hydrology; Sustainability	Objectivity; Facts; Science; **Apolitical**	High: Science-based claims → Objectivity	State-wide (dispersed)
Paschim Odisha Krushak Samanwayan Samiti ('Western Odisha Farmers Coordination Committee')	Farmers' Interests; Agriculture vs. Industry	Farmers' well-being; Anti-Industry	High: Lived experiences; Affected communities	Inland

Figure 8. Stated motivations of Mahanadi River movement groups

For instance, members of Paschim Odisha typically emphasized the livelihood stakes of its constituents and the group's long history of engagement in Mahanadi River activism. This combination of identities has cast Paschim Odisha as a highly legitimate movement group, as demonstrated in the following excerpt from a Paschim Odisha leader in an inland district:

> "In 2005 when we came to know that water from this river would be diverted to various industries around the [Hirakud] dam, we started studying about its implication. And since it was a dam that was constructed five decades ago – 1957 it was completed - from our own experiences, experience of farmers, we had a very clear apprehension that the agricultural community who gave water for irrigation, fishing community who fish from the dam, they will be affected."

Members of WIO tended to emphasize the group's dedication to 'objective' science and facts. Further, the group has taken care to position itself as a 'neutral' voice in the increasingly contentious and highly-politicized conflict. As such, WIO is deemed highly legitimate as well:

> "Though we invite [MBA] to our platform, we have been a little more careful in how far we associate and to what level that association is seen… In the case of some of the positions which [MBA] has taken, it is very pro-Odisha state. There was an internal reflection saying that if we do a study for – on behalf of one

state, the forum's credibility with the other state will go down. So that's a problem. This whole area is a bit of a very messy arena. So as a larger network we need to be rather clear with whom, to what extent we associate in things… we don't want to seem completely aligned with Mahanadi Bachao Andolan"

-NGO Employee, coastal district

"[WIO] has been trying to create awareness about river, the dying nature of river. They're the group – at least they have got a bigger picture understanding. There has to be some scientific understanding of the whole thing has to be there. It's not rocket science."

-NGO Employee, coastal district

Finally, MBA focused its discussions of motivation on its concern for Odia society's well-being. As such, it has framed its role in the conflict as a group 'for the people' despite its new group status and relative detachment from livelihood stakes. By taking steps to ensure that inland communities participate in their protest events, MBA claims to be not only a group 'for the people', but also a group '*by* the people'. However, several interviewees highlighted the detached, duplicitous, and exclusive nature of MBA's work. The seemingly disingenuous nature of MBA's work (see Fig. 6) – combined with widespread perceptions of coastal 'elitism' – have given this group very little legitimacy:

"[This conflict] is a fight between the governments. It's a fight between the political parties. Actually there are nowhere the real people in those fights. Whatever they say that they are doing these Andolans - road blockage whatever - it is the same you know, for the same issues. It's not for the real people's issues."

-Water Initiatives Odisha leader, coastal district

"The meeting was held; I heard them; and we were not given any chance to speak. The meeting was held. The leaders of [MBA] delivered speeches. The general people did not get chance to say anything. The public has not been given chance to say something; whatever they would speak from the stage, we would listen to that."

-Village resident, inland district

"Everybody is crying for the Mahanadi. But not a drop of tear in anyone's eyes!"

-Paschim Odisha leader, inland district

"Honestly speaking, I don't know how serious is Odisha politicians, but they are not serious about water, Mahanadi... Now [MBA] is trying to use Mahanadi as a political, you know, reason to get more votes. And when they do so, what happens no, like – so even if they are serious, it requires understanding a river, requires a kind of very nuanced understanding. We started reading the river about hydrological integrity. Very technical thing. But when you start reading and understanding sociocultural, hydrological complexities, our understanding is more nuanced. And even still it is not very complete. So that requires patience, that requires you know, *understanding*. But what happens when political masters frame a strategy which is implemented or mass mobilized by their grassroot workers?"

-NGO Employee, coastal district

Groups like MBA lack legitimizing identities and must find alternate ways to boost their status within the movement. Rather than rely on those few identities which do produce legitimacy, they tend to draw from the identities and experiences of other groups.

ii. Tokenism in the Mahanadi River movement

Tokenism was used by Mahanadi River movement groups to boost their legitimacy. This was particularly true for MBA, given its low legitimacy status among other movement groups. MBA has allegedly drawn tokens from inland communities:

"Either any person or any group has made themselves involved in the Mahanadi movement. As a matter of fact, some people from [MBA's] side would come and tell us, 'We would provide you $7,000-$14,000 under various heads and a group of women would come.' They would not tell the purpose! They would not tell about why we are going! 'Come to our meeting and join us. Let there be a gathering for the meeting.' It is their sole purpose... They would be told, 'Your group would get a scope of getting Rs.5 lakh to 10 lakh. So come to our meeting and join it... If they would be told the truth, 'Come children! Involve yourself in the Mahanadi movement', then no one would go."

-Village resident, inland district

"Prior to holding a rally, we are informed about that, 'On such and such date a rally is going to be held. All of you must go. On such and such places we will meet'... We would not be able to know what kind of rally that would be! We don't know! Then they will say that for such and such incidents the rally is going

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> "to be held. Then we will go! What else? As we desperately need the water of the Mahanadi, for that reason we go."
>
> *-Village resident, inland district*

> "The meeting was for the problems that we are facing for the scarcity of water. We are told [by MBA] to say, 'All the mothers should say together that we are facing problems for the scarcity of water.' They are saying like this!"
>
> *-Village resident, inland district*

MBA also drew from WIO, utilizing narratives of ecological integrity and sustainability to enhance its claim of having 'apolitical' motivations:

> "Mahanadi issue pertaining to the dispute between two states – Odisha and Chhattisgarh – needs to be seen from a different perspective. Not just a kind of a conflict for sharing of water, rather it is a kind of you know the right of the river over its water and ecological, environmental, and e-flow of the river. Including the sustainability of the biodiversity around Mahanadi."
>
> *-Mahanadi Bachao Andolan leader, coastal district*

> "This is the big challenge: stop Mahanadi and other rivers from the pollution. We can't move - now this is the time. You can't move Jharsuguda, you can't move Sambalpur. There are huge pollution, you can't believe."
>
> *-Mahanadi Bachao Andolan, coastal district*

Further adding to its reputation of disingenuity, MBA has been accused to appropriating its very name – Mahanadi Bachao Andolan – from the historic water activism work done in the Mahanadi basin by groups like Paschim Odisha:

> "So Mahanadi Bachao Andolan, actual Mahanadi Bachao Andolan was started in 2005/6 for you know protesting against water diversion to [industry]… So now, this name has been borrowed by these people. So when [government] took this position, it was really an opportune moment when Chhattisgarh – so it was kind of you know, what do you call it, an ideal time has come."
>
> *-NGO Employee, inland district*

Discussion: Rendering 'real' work invisible

How are intra-movement groups organized and how do they manage their legitimacy? In the case of the Mahanadi River movement, groups operate in a factionalized context in which they must establish and maintain their legitimacy. Doing so requires navigating spatially-embedded power relations and deploying only those identities deemed to be legitimizing (e.g. livelihood stakes, 'objective' scientific expertise). Those groups with fewer legitimizing qualities were found to tokenize other groups' identities and experiences to bolster their own legitimacy. Underlying these trends are assumptions about what constitutes 'legitimate' motivation and involvement. The results of this study point to deeply-rooted notions of what is – and what is not – genuine or authentic. Resulting hierarchies of legitimacy cast inland communities (represented by groups like Paschim Odisha) as 'real'. Groups like MBA tokenize 'real' communities with the intent of achieving a similarly high legitimacy status, effectively masking the decades of work done by inland groups in the process.

i. Understanding 'real' movements

In attempting to understand what is 'real', it is helpful to explore how the opposite (i.e. what is not 'real') is constituted. Results from this case study reveal that MBA falls squarely within the latter category. There are several potential factors contributing to this determination. MBA is (a) a new group (b) consisting of politicians and bureaucrats, which surreptitiously arose (c) immediately after the announcement of upstream dam construction and (d) before the 2019 Legislative Assembly election. Opportunistic timing aside, MBA's interest in Mahanadi River resistance seems further disingenuous given the deeply-engrained notions of coastal elitism attached to this group. The rise of this group, driven primarily by shifting external political context, is deemed insincere due to spatially-embedded impressions of group identity and motivation.

The rise of MBA illustrates Larsen's (2008) conceptualization of place as an exploitative political tool. In tokenizing inland community members and their spaces, MBA is effectively using the tokens as tools to increase their own legitimacy. However, in this case, place is used

not to construct a collective identity, but rather to bestow legitimacy upon the tokenizer. Since place is tied closely to identity, such tokenization reinforces essentialist ideas of inland communities as vulnerable. Further, MBA actions reflect Subasic et al.'s (2008) observation of high-status groups acting in political solidarity with low-status groups. This particular case builds on Subasic et al.'s work in demonstrating how such 'collaborations' may in fact be concealing a more exploitative relationship.

On the other hand, results clearly demonstrated that inland communities – represented by Paschim Odisha – constitute the 'real' Mahanadi River movement. This group's legitimacy is tied closely to its history of activism and its constituents' high livelihood stakes, both of which are tied closely to space. The results of this study expand on Woods' (2003) ideas of group organizing based on place-based, intersectional identities by tying in selective identity deployment. Given its position as the voice of inland, river-dependent communities, Paschim Odisha represents several highly-legitimate identities, rendering the group itself 'real'.

ii. Rise of the disingenuous, subversion of the 'real'

Though MBA is generally understood *within* the movement to be politically-motivated and thus insincere, it is nonetheless able to maintain its presence in the Mahanadi River movement by utilizing its resources and political clout to bolster its external legitimacy. That is, because MBA is able to leverage its resources to draw tokens from inland communities, it is perceived by those *external* to the movement as a group 'by the people and for the people'. These actions are made possible due to the complex, spatially-embedded power structures present in this factionalized context. Specifically, MBA is able to successfully tokenize inland communities because purported offers of five lakh rupees – equivalent to approximately $7,000 – are impossible (or at least extraordinarily difficult) to refuse by Odia villagers who typically earn five to six US dollars per month.

Because legitimacy is perceived based on external signals (Polletta and Kritschmer, 2015), misrepresentations of Mahanadi River movement events may perpetuate MBA's narrative of its stance as a group 'by the people'. For instance, media coverage of Mahanadi Bachao

Andolan events typically features photographs of protesters (see Fig. 9) without explaining who they are or how they came to participate in the event itself.

Figure 9. Photographs from media reports of Mahanadi Bachao Andolan events (odishatv.in;orissadiary.com)

This process of tokenization and misrepresentation restructures intra-movement understandings of legitimacy in a way that necessarily produces winners and losers. In this case study, though inland communities (i.e. the tokenized) may become the face of the Mahanadi River movement, it is ultimately the interest of coastal groups (i.e. the tokenizers) being served. This case study parallels the example provided by Woods (2003) in which formal, nationally-recognized, self-serving movement groups co-opted rural American interests, reshaping the trajectory of the movement as a whole. In the case of the Mahanadi River movement, MBA has co-opted the legitimizing identities of inland communities to further its own alleged interests, subverting the work done by 'real' groups like Paschim Odisha in the process. Figure 10 outlines the process described here, starting with the tokenization of 'real' communities and the resulting reconstruction of intra-movement legitimacy, followed by the production of winners and losers.

For groups like Paschim Odisha which are further spatially, socially, and politically detached from centers of power than their factional counterparts, protest is a critical political tool. In many cases, protest may be the group's *only* viable political recourse in the context of insecure water access. By subverting the interests of 'real' groups, the process of tokenization and legitimacy reconstruction renders protest an ineffective tool for those groups who rely on it most (see Fig. 10). The significance of these dynamics is compounded in the context of water

movements given the status of water as an essential resource. In cases of water insecurity, groups who are tokenized and rendered invisible in large-scale water movements may face 'life or death' consequences based on movement outcomes (Bardhan, 1974).
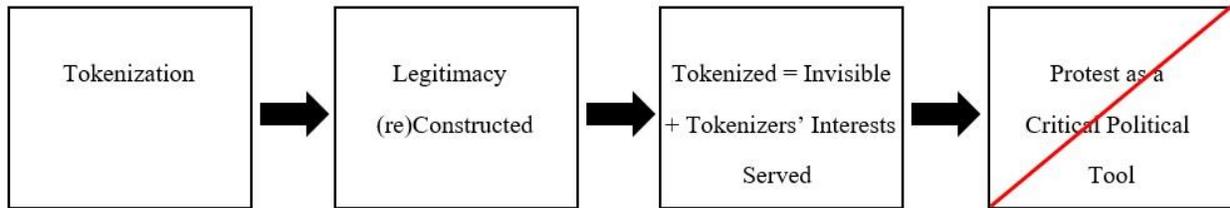

Figure 10. Tokenization, Legitimacy, and Protest as a Critical Political Tool

Despite the context-specific complexities associated with this study, the implications of this work can – and *should* – be used to scrutinize broader socio-political movements (1) which claim to represent a broad range of interests and (2) in which power imbalances exist between groups. As in the case of the Mahanadi River movement, these characteristics facilitate exploitation and perpetuate within-movement injustices, albeit in a more covert manner. Thus, even when socio-political movements are deemed successful, the question remains: successful for whom?

This work contributes a more nuanced view of environmental activism to the environmental justice and political ecology fields. Environmental justice scholars and activists typically view 'disadvantaged' communities as homogenous groups protesting for equal access to environmental benefits and protection from environmental harms. However, this study highlights the spatially-embedded, identity-based variation that exists in such movements and the dangerous implications of inattention to power imbalances through the organizing process. Disregard of such nuances may result in further disenfranchisement of society's most disadvantaged groups. Further, political ecologists have emphasized the ways in which conflicts over access to resources are embedded in politics, identity, and values. This study incorporates the spatial dimension and demonstrates the ways in which these factors interact to re-produce understandings of legitimacy within the protest movement context.

Conclusion

How are intra-movement groups organized and how do they manage their legitimacy? This study, grounded in literature on factionalism in socio-political movements and spatiality of power and protest, used the case of the Mahanadi River movement in Odisha, India to address these research questions.

Results from four months of field work demonstrated that intra-movement groups are organized factionally and spatially. Regarding the former, the Mahanadi River movement was split into three major factions, differentiated by stated and perceived motivations, place-based identity, and legitimacy. Further, this case study highlighted the decades-long tenuous relationship between inland and coastal communities. In this antagonistic and distrustful relationship, inland communities have been – and continue to be – exploited by coastal actors. These relations are embedded in the social and political fabric of Odisha state, resulting in place-based, essentialist ideas of coastal elitism and inland simplicity and vulnerability. Further, intra-movement groups were found to manage their legitimacy using two related mechanisms: selective identity deployment and tokenism. Movement groups – constituting and representing several intersectional social identities – emphasized only those identities deemed legitimizing by their factional counterparts. Those areas in which a given group lacked legitimacy, groups were found to draw from (or tokenize) the identities and experiences of other, more legitimate groups.

In discussing the construction of intra-movement legitimacy, I found that interviewees had established hierarchies of legitimacy in which some groups were considered 'real' and other groups the opposite. In this paper's discussion, I drew from the results, my field observations, and relevant literature to clarify understandings of 'real' movements, illustrate how tokenism for the sake of legitimacy masks the work done by 'real' groups, and how this process necessarily casts 'real' communities as 'the loser'.

This study builds on existing work on legitimacy in protest movements, yet there remain significant gaps in understanding. In this study, movement factions are treated as groups with homogenous identities and interests. However, there certainly exists variation in identity and

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power within each group. Future research may explore these within-group dynamics to determine how they may contribute to legitimacy and representation at the group or movement levels. For instance, within-group power imbalances along gender, race, or class lines may affect the ways in which groups address issues of legitimacy and representation. How might MBA's legitimacy status have changed if the group's leadership included non-politicians? Does the work done by Paschim Odisha reflect the gendered effects of water insecurity? Another direction for future research is to investigate the role of objectivity and authority in the construction of intra-movement legitimacy. Though this was certainly a salient identity for the WIO group in this case study, the nature of the data collected precluded robust analysis into this question. Does the legitimacy afforded to 'objective' groups with highly-educated leadership detract from the legitimacy – and thus protest power – of other groups? These dynamics are worth investigating further.

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