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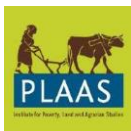


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Ahilan Kadirgamar and Niyanthini Kadirgamar

Introduction

In Sri Lanka, ravaged by ethnic conflict and a civil war, nationalism for decades was at the centre of political debates. In fact, political economic questions, including about neoliberalism – though Sri Lanka was the first country in South Asia to liberalise its economy in 1977 – were side-lined by even leftist intellectuals due to the urgency of addressing the civil war (A. Kadirgamar, 2017a). This intellectual anomaly of contemporary analysis of nationalism preceding critiques of neoliberalism provides an interesting vantage point to engage the recent international scholarly interest on authoritarian populism.

Even as critiques of neoliberalism gained mainstream importance after the global economic crisis of 2008, contemporary forms of nationalism and populism (Rodrik, 2018), and in some intellectual debates the constitution of authoritarian populism, have emerged as a central question (Scoones et al., 2018; Bello, 2018). These concerns have gained further attention with the election of Trump in the US and Brexit in Europe; however, the resurgence of nationalism in the West has a longer trajectory with rising anti-immigrant politics over the last few decades. Interestingly, the common narrative of the emergence of neoliberalism also begins with changes in the US and UK, with the rise of Reagan and Thatcher respectively. This discussion of neoliberalism, nationalism and authoritarian populism that privilege developments in the West and particularly, the US and UK, are subject to debate.

We engage questions about neoliberalism, nationalism and populism and their relationship to authoritarian power from the periphery; the war-devastated rural districts in northern Sri Lanka. The location of a rural war-torn region provides for analysis of the deeper reach of neoliberalism, nationalist politics and populist measures, as they have to percolate through disrupted economic and political structures after decades of devastation. The resistance in turn to neoliberal policies, nationalist mobilisations and populist measures, by rural struggles and movements suggest possibilities for the emergence of new forms of progressive rural politics. The character of such rural struggles and the structure of the rural movements, their relationship to caste contradictions and women's everyday politics, as well as their engagement with the state provide insights about the constraints and potential for emancipatory rural politics.

Historically, Sri Lanka is an interesting case; in terms of the history of import substitution regimes, the early emergence of neoliberal policies, the over-determination of politics by nationalist movements and for decades when the war isolated its northern region from neoliberal globalisation. Neoliberal policies in Sri Lanka were initiated before the rise of Reagan and Thatcher in 1977 with the authoritarian regime of President Jayawardena (Herring, 1987; Lakshman, 1980). The politics in the country both before and during the neoliberal era were shaped by Sinhala Buddhist and Tamil nationalisms as well as populist measures.

In northern Sri Lanka, Tamil nationalism was the dominant political project after Independence in 1948, as state power remained aloof of the Tamil elite. The rise of Tamil militancy, and eventually the brutal consolidation of the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) waging a war for a separate state, adopted an authoritarian approach to rule over the Tamil polity. The civil war starting in the 1980s, cut off the market and devastated the northern economy, delaying the reach of neoliberal policies in the country until the end of the war in May 2009. With the war victory in 2009, the Rajapaksa regime consolidated authoritarian power by promising accelerated economic development,

continuing with militarisation and privileging a Sinhala Buddhist nationalist discourse. It is with regime change in January 2015, and the opening of democratic space that people's struggles began to emerge in northern Sri Lanka.

Situating questions about neoliberalism, nationalism and populism in Sri Lanka, broaden understandings of historical and political developments. Do neoliberal policies emerge in the West and then spread to the Global South, or do neoliberal policies evolve in confrontations with nationalist, populist and other political projects and go through considerable innovation in the Global South? What can we learn about the relationship of neoliberalism to authoritarian populism, when we look at a place like northern Sri Lanka, where neoliberal policies were only implemented after tremendous nationalist mobilisations? Would the collapse of militant nationalist forces – and for that matter authoritarian populist regimes – necessarily lead to new forms of emancipatory politics or strengthen neoliberalism?

The political dynamics of protracted armed conflicts are different, as is the case in Sri Lanka. Does resistance in those post-war cases take on an emancipatory vision or does it become preoccupied with survival? How do decades of devastation, dispossession and economic exclusion, shape both the struggles themselves and the local discourses of rural politics? We begin with such questions in a particular post-colonial post-war place, critique political engagement against neoliberalism, nationalism and populism, and explore the potential sources of progressive rural politics.

Background and Perspective

The central questions in this paper are about the relationship of neoliberalism, nationalism and populism to rural struggles and the possibilities of emancipatory politics after protracted armed conflict. We address these questions through a historically situated analysis of persistent nationalist political culture, post-war neoliberal reconstruction, populist measures of appeasing social and economic discontent, and the challenges for rural politics with democratisation in Sri Lanka. The paper specifically discusses four recent issues and struggles, for people's productive resources and against neoliberal schemes, in the rural North after the opening of democratic space in 2015. The limitations of such issues and struggles provide the backdrop for analysis of resistance politics. The paper ends with a discussion of different contemporary regimes and the possibilities for emancipatory politics.

The paper draws on six years of research and activism of the two authors in post-war northern Sri Lanka. While the war affected regions in Sri Lanka span the Northern and Eastern Provinces, much of the work of both authors have been in the North. Many of the same issues and challenges overlap the North and East, however, this paper focuses only on the North, even as the authors recognise the importance of basing similar work in the East. In addition to the research conducted for the ERPI project¹ and the authors' scholarly work for academic and research institutions², this paper in particular draws on their activist work with local organisations towards advocacy on many of the issues discussed below.³ Many of the political insights are drawn from such engagement including self-critical reflections about the limits of advocacy and engagement with the state. This paper is in

¹The authors visited some of the sights during the land related protests and engaged with the communities directly involved in the struggles in Mannar, Mullaitivu, Killinochchi and Jaffna districts. Focused research on indebtedness in a selected village in Pooneryn, in the Killinochchi district was also conducted. Caste conflicts around cemeteries in selected divisions in Jaffna were studied and conducted discussions in oppressed caste villages to understand current and emerging caste dynamics.

²Research includes a study on the Palk-bay fishing issue for REINCORPFISH project (a multi-disciplinary research project to investigate small-scale fisher conflicts), research on micro-finance schemes and caste-relations carried out for the Ecumenical Institute for Study and Dialogue (EISD), Ahilan Kadirgamar's PhD thesis titled "The failure of post-war reconstruction in Jaffna, Sri Lanka: indebtedness, caste exclusion and the search for alternatives" and Niyanthini Kadirgamar's research for the Law and Society Trust (LST) on "Landlessness and land related conflicts in post-war North" and "Women's experiences of poverty and social security".

³Advocacy work included appropriate housing for war affected communities as part of a team that developed an alternative housing proposal, media campaigns and policy work on the Palk-bay fishing conflict, Ahilan Kadirgamar's participation in a Committee appointed by the Fisheries Ministry to address the Migrant Fisher issue in the Mullaitivu District, and discussions with the Central Bank on the microfinance-led indebtedness and discussions on caste issues in the Jaffna District.

many ways our attempt to engage a question that has repeatedly emerged in our activist forums and with leftist interlocutors, as to why an alternative movement for progressive rural politics has not emerged out of the many struggles in recent years, and what might be the character of any such future movement.

Extensive theorisation of the central concepts of neoliberalism, nationalism and populism are beyond the purview of this paper. Our political economic perspective draws on some theories, even as we adopt them for analysis of our concrete situation in northern Sri Lanka. We understand neoliberalism as an accumulation strategy of finance capital backed by the state promoting free markets and individual agents (Harvey, 2005). For our purposes, nationalism is a political movement that constructs and projects a homogenous view of communities within certain territorial boundaries, even as it seeks to mobilise those communities towards hegemonic, separatist and exclusionary ends (Hobsbawm, 1990). Populism seeks to consolidate the power and legitimacy of regimes through the top-down expansion of state subsidies and services to supposedly address the social and economic problems of the people (Moore, 1997). Authoritarianism we find to be on a spectrum of the draconian uses of state power⁴, and compatible with different kinds of political regimes, and is often shaped by the historical moment.

This paper focuses on four selected post-war cases; housing reconstruction, rural indebtedness with microfinance schemes, land issues and confrontations, and struggles of the northern fishing communities. While the authors have been involved with research and advocacy on various issues, for example rural education and Tamil-Muslim relations, these four cases are chosen for the national prominence they have gained, the variety of social actors and institutions involved, the progress made on these issues, and the political possibilities and limitations they elucidate.

These issues and struggles are continuing to change and their future course is open. Thus this paper is exploratory and seeks to merely hypothesise about the potential for emancipatory politics. The long and vibrant history and continued presence of co-operatives including their federated structures, make them relevant as democratic social institutions for alternative rural economic programmes. Caste and gender are not only cross cutting themes, but also suggest potential for rural transformation and are relevant for questions of emancipatory politics in northern Sri Lanka.

Fluidity of Nationalism, Populism and Neoliberalism

Sri Lanka has been an early starter on many fronts. It was the first country in Asia to achieve universal suffrage during the late colonial period under the British in 1931. By the mid-1930s, it produced a left movement with a trade union base and was a pioneer in the development of co-operatives, including one of the first co-operative hospitals in Asia. Soon after Independence in 1948, it sought major agricultural development projects with international financial support recommended by an extensive World Bank mission and the Colombo Plan for development. Such early development initiatives were shaped by policies that attempted to cut subsidies, liberalise trade and the inflow of finances, but were opposed by mass agitations including the Great Hartal of 1953 that shook the pro-West Government. Populist coalition governments with sections of the left beginning in 1956, took Sri Lanka out of the orbit of the West as it became an active member in the non-aligned movement, and initiated import substitution policies along with an emphasis on rural development. It was known as a model development state in the 1970s for having achieved high human development indicators despite its low per capita income, through robust social welfare policies, particularly free education and healthcare (Lakshman, 1987). On the other hand, it was one of the first countries to overtly champion neoliberal policies in 1977 (Herring, 1987; Skandakumar, 2014).

The anti-colonial nationalist forces that gained momentum after Independence, eventually captured state power and installed Sinhala Buddhist majoritarian policies leading to the polarisation of the country. The economic approach of these Sinhala Buddhist nationalist regimes, drawing on the

⁴ Significantly, we categorise as authoritarian, armed movements controlling territory to also have state-like power, as with the LTTE.

support of sections of the left, were characterised by import substitution policies with populist measures for their rural constituencies. The Tamil nationalist response to such Sinhala Buddhist majoritarianism was characterised by Tamil youth militancy which were the early signs of the devastating civil war. In this context, the political economy of post-colonial Sri Lanka during its first three decades led to shifts between moves to liberalise the economy and nationalist mobilisations linked with populist policies of subsidies for the rural population and settlements for the Sinhala peasantry (Moore, 1990).

The launch of neoliberal policies – with trade and financial liberalisation, the rapid urbanisation of Colombo and the building of free trade zones to produce exports – coincided with authoritarian rule on the one hand and increasingly fervent nationalist mobilisations. The right-wing United National Party (UNP) led by J. R. Jayawardena architected an Executive Presidency in 1978 with tremendous concentration of powers in one individual. Backed by the West, including considerable inflows of capital, accelerated liberalisation policies were taken forward along with attacks on the labour movement.⁵ In the North of the country, the Jayawardena regime sought to brutally quash Tamil militancy, including through a state of emergency and a draconian Prevention of Terrorism Act in 1979. The increasing violence against the Tamil population including the state sponsored pogrom of 1983 culminated in a civil war with India backing Tamil militant movements.

Northern Sri Lanka was embroiled in war from the mid-1980s to the end of the war in 2009. While the military used indiscriminate violence in the war-affected regions, including shelling and bombing, the LTTE was systematic in eliminating any opposition to its control of the Tamil community. The once powerful anti-caste movement in the North in the 1960s and 1970s were overshadowed by the rise of Tamil nationalism and eventually dismantled by the LTTE. The Tamil media was controlled through fear, Tamil intellectuals assassinated and what remained of Left parties and their trade union base as well as other independent political actors were purged by the LTTE. Social institutions such as co-operative societies and community centres were co-opted by the LTTE to build its social base. Other communities such as the Sinhala community and Muslim community were demonised; the Muslim community in the North was expelled by the LTTE in 1990, in an act of ethnic cleansing. The LTTE during its two and a half decade reign over the Tamil community had restructured Tamil politics with its ruthless authoritarian rule buttressed by a rabid separatist Tamil nationalism (Hoole et al, 1992).⁶

The end of the war in May 2009, with the decimation of the LTTE by the State, brought tremendous changes to the country under the authoritarian Rajapaksa regime. Having won the war with tremendous civilian cost, the regime ruled the North with the heavy hand of the security forces including the seizure of large tracts of private land. The regime took forward its national development agenda merging it with militarisation; the Urban Development Authority, responsible for the beautification of cities and slum demolition, was brought under the Defence Ministry. While the Rajapaksa regime's first term (2005 to 2010) included extensive populist measures of electrification and local road development for the rural South, its second term (2010 to 2014) accelerated neoliberal policies centred on urbanisation and financialisation, particularly as the national and global conditions changed after the war.

We provide this historical sketch to illustrate how liberalisation, nationalist mobilisations, populist measures and authoritarian tendencies have characterised postcolonial Sri Lanka. We argue that these political economic processes are fluid and reinforce or substitute each other depending on the historical moment. Thus neoliberal, nationalist and populist processes are shaped as much by global developments as by the manoeuvres of regimes, but working within the constraints of the social and economic structures including of rural societies. Indeed, rural constituencies⁷ at various moments have

⁵The General Strike of July 1980 was decisively crushed by the Jayawardena regime, from which the trade unions never recovered.

⁶Dr. Rajini Thiranagama, a member of the University Teachers for Human Rights-Jaffna (UTHR), was assassinated by the LTTE on account of her criticism of the LTTE. UTHR's work is perhaps the most important archive on the war and the LTTE. See: www.uthr.org

⁷The importance of such rural constituencies elicited an important intellectual debate on intermediate regimes in Sri Lanka. Michal Kalecki put forward a theory on the consequences of the weakness of the bourgeoisie in the Third World by analysing the relationship between different classes that come together to control state power (Kalecki, 1972). This theory on intermediate regimes stimulated a vibrant debate in Sri Lanka, by scholars such as Amita Shastri, Newton Gunasinghe, Sunil Bastian and Jayadeva Uyangoda (Shastri, 1983a). This debate also

electorally determined significant shifts in ruling regimes throughout Sri Lanka's post-colonial history (Moore, 1985). As early as 1956, the elitist Bandaranaike regime joined forces with sections of the left and vocalised the interests of the peasantry to capture state power (Gunasinghe, 1996). Even after the launch of neoliberal policies by the Jayawardene government in 1977, the Premadasa government that followed from the same UNP adopted populist measures in tandem with liberalisation (Moore, 1997). The Kumaratunga government elected with a people's movement after the elections instituted neoliberal policies of privatisation. The Rajapaksa government's populist orientation changed to accelerated neoliberal policies with the inflow of global finance capital. We claim that this analysis of the inter-section of such seemingly varying politics is important for conceptualising the possibilities for emancipatory politics.

Post-war Northern Politics and the Emergence of Struggles

The post-war years from 2009 to 2014 polarised the country as the Northern population lived in fear under an arbitrary militarised order. Tamil politics was a wasteland with no alternative vision and only a weak leadership of political parties, as the LTTE had decimated or absorbed their party cadres during its rule. The internationalised politics of the Tamil nationalist diaspora backed by Western powers – opposed to the Rajapaksa regime – reinforced a post-war nationalist discourse within the northern Tamil community; particularly, a victim discourse centred on internationalised claims about war crimes and genocide at the end of the war (A. Kadirgamar, 2018).

Economically, the North was subject to problematic reconstruction policies including the building of large infrastructure, expansion of credit and the promotion of self-employment schemes. Rural livelihoods including in agriculture and fisheries received little support from the state, and were undermined by militarised land grabs and restrictions on fishing grounds. This flawed approach to reconstruction, particularly with exploitative and predatory finance led to tremendous indebtedness and dispossession. These neoliberal reconstruction policies resulted in atomised individuals, going against the vibrancy of community organisations including co-operatives and community centres that had survived the war (A. Kadirgamar, 2014).

The Northern Provincial Council (NPC), for which elections were held in 2013 after twenty five years came under the fold of the Tamil nationalists. However, the NPC merely regurgitated the victim discourse and failed to address economic concerns. In the South of the country, the military was promoted as “war heroes” and in the North the vanquished LTTE were remembered as “martyrs”, with Sinhala Buddhist and Tamil nationalisms reinforcing each other. Overall, post-war Tamil politics did little to address the social and economic concerns of the war-torn population, rather, it remained silent on the neoliberal reconstruction policies as it focused on an emotive Tamil nationalist electoral politics.

This was the situation in the North, when regime change in January 2015 created a major democratic opening. The war-torn communities that had lived under fear and militarisation for decades began to voice their concerns and take forward struggles, including sustained protests lasting months. The legacy of the war and repression framed some struggles including issues such as the predicament of the disappeared during the war and the continued indefinite detention of prisoners under the Prevention of Terrorism Act. Other struggles sought to confront the neoliberal reconstruction policies and programs after the war as well as resources lost or undermined during the war and its aftermath.

The backdrop to these struggles was a deepening economic crisis in the North with few avenues for regular incomes, rising indebtedness and continuing forms of dispossession undermining rural

sought to explain the prominence given to the rural economy by successive regimes, the emergence of welfare policies and the implementation of import substitution policies in Sri Lanka between 1956 and 1977. We extend this discussion of intermediate regimes to understand the populist measures undertaken by governments during the import substitution period. We further claim that certain populist measures existed during the previous period (1948-1956) when a comprador bourgeoisie was in power and continued later in different forms under neoliberal regimes (post 1977). The significant point here is that interpolating the support of rural constituencies has remained important for different regimes in Sri Lanka.

livelihoods. We have selected four issues and corresponding contestations and struggles that illustrate the complex ways in which rural politics in the North engaged neoliberal, nationalist and populist forces and measures.

Housing reconstruction

The Northern Province population of 1.1 million had been subjected to displacement, bombing and shelling, with many losing their permanent houses resulting in the need for large housing schemes after the war. Thus, one of the most important reconstruction initiatives were the donor provided housing grants for war-affected low-income families. By 2015, more than 100,000 houses were built with the funds of various donors.⁸ These housing schemes were owner-driven, where the home owner was given the housing grant at various stages as the house was built. These owner-driven schemes augmented rural incomes as in most villages many farmers and fishermen who could not find adequate incomes switched to seasonal masonry work.

In 2015, the estimated housing needs of the war-affected in the North and East was for another 137,000 houses leading to a Cabinet decision to build 65,000 houses. However, a deal with a foreign company revealed crass efforts to profiteer from the housing needs of a war-torn community (Wijedasa, 2016). Arcelor Mittal, a multinational company was offered a problematic contract to import prefabricated steel houses. Each steel house was to cost Rs. 2.1 million, double the cost of a time-tested brick and mortar house, which are far more suited for the climate and lifestyle of people in the North and East. The project was to be financed through a foreign loan from HSBC.⁹ The Government was to incur a foreign debt of about US\$ 1 billion for the 65,000 houses, to be paid back over a 10-year period.

It was believed the drop in steel prices in the world market and losses for the world's leading steel producer led to the multi-national company dumping prefabricated steel houses. The Sri Lankan Government agreed to this excessive foreign loan despite its accusations against the Rajapaksa regime that it had contributed to a deteriorating economy through development projects with foreign borrowings.

There was only limited public opposition to the project in the North.¹⁰ The project was for the most part halted by a campaign led by a group of journalists, researchers, political representatives, engineers, architects, economists and housing experts who put forward an alternate proposal.¹¹ They engaged in a media campaign and were effective in lobbying sections of the Government.

A strong peoples' mobilisation to oppose the housing project did not emerge. In fact, some sections of the Tamil elite, including a number of professionals supported the move to import prefab houses. Significantly, Eelam People's Democratic Party (EPDP), a party aligned to previous governments and known for its populist appeal through the distribution of handouts to its oppressed caste base, supported the prefab housing scheme claiming that it could at least serve as a temporary house for the marginalised sections of the population. This populist move treating housing schemes as merely a handout from the state to low income households neutralised criticism and undermined resistance by the mainly rural communities.

⁸ A 50,000 housing scheme worth US\$ 225 million by the Indian Government and another 50,000 houses by the World Bank and other bilateral donors.

⁹ A financing arrangement through HSBC offered two options – a six month EU currency-based facility at EURIBOR +1.34% and a six-month US dollar-based facility at LIBOR +1.74%. These concessionary rates applied to 85% of the loan. The remaining 15% was to be based on commercial rates of LIBOR +5.61%.

¹⁰ A public statement was released signed by 100 concerned individuals from the North, resulting in a meeting with the concerned resettlement Minister. Both authors of this paper were part of a group that met with the Minister.

¹¹ The alternate proposal consisted of 1) the capacity to create economic stimulus locally, where 25% of the cost of each house is spent as direct labour, the housing project could have provided about 65,000 individual incomes for one year, 2) Given the lower cost of brick and mortar houses, 102,000 houses could have been built for the same present value of the 65,000 imported houses with a ten year loan, 3) relieve the country of a US\$ 1 billion foreign currency loan by floating a rupee bond in the local markets. The interventions regarding this campaign are documented in this timeline <http://www.tiki-toki.com/timeline/entry/717900/Building-65000-pre-fabricated-steel-houses-in-Northern-Sri-Lanka/>

Financialised Indebtedness

Financialisation has been central to Sri Lanka's neoliberal economic policies during its post-war years; financial flows from international capital markets, promotion of the stock market and the expansion of the financial sector. The rural North was also impacted by the expansion of credit, with many banks and financial companies opening up branches after the war. The forms of credit and related debt have also gone through many phases, starting with loans linked to resuming agriculture, pawning, self-employment programmes and housing construction.¹²

The state's vision of reconstruction – that a population devastated by war for decades could resume its economic life through loans – resulted not just in the disruption of livelihoods and diminishing avenues for employment, but also new forms of dispossession (Srinivasan, 2017a). With livelihoods and incomes in crisis, the war-torn population was dispossessed of their main emergency asset; gold jewellery passed down through the generations was pawned and lost in large quantities, particularly as global gold prices rose after the Global Economic Crisis of 2008.¹³ The population was pushed to abject poverty.¹⁴

At present, the worst exploiters of the war-torn regions are lease-hire purchasing and microfinance schemes. These schemes have been predatory, and micro-finance loans in particular charge exorbitant interest rates.¹⁵ Their aggressive and often abusive collectors disrupt community and familial life to the extent that the women's federations in some districts, particularly Jaffna and Kilinochchi, have appealed to their District Secretaries, the chief administrative officer, to ban such schemes. The depth of the problem is also reflected by the increasing number of suicides and attempted suicides linked to such indebtedness. After years of indifference and denial by the state, the Central Bank finally acknowledged the magnitude of the problem of indebtedness in the North towards the latter part of 2017, although follow up action to rein in the issue has been slow (Srinivasan, 2017b).

Credit has always been a problem for rural communities in Sri Lanka, as money lenders and other loan sharks have exploited and even bonded rural populations. The efforts to formalise rural credit by colonial officials led to the formation of co-operative credit societies in the 1910s. Furthermore, the populist policies in the 1960s led to the formation of the People's Bank (Kurukulasuriya, 1971). Ironically, in recent times it is the formal financial institutions taking forward micro-finance schemes that are functioning as loan sharks.

The gendered character of oppression through indebtedness, has led to women bearing the brunt of the burden of debt and abuse related to loan recovery. Women were targeted by financial companies as they were deemed more reliable borrowers and more unlikely to default. Incomes generated by women's labour, contributing significantly to rural life, are extracted by micro-finance schemes; particularly, loans provided in the guise of 'empowering women' for self-employment projects. Employees of the financial companies visit the homes of the women for the recovery of microfinance loans, with frequent instances of verbal and physical abuse on their female clients. Such unrestricted and abusive reach into the villages and homes by the lenders also reveals the low levels of resistance by the people.¹⁶

¹²We studied a village (Karadikundu, a fishing community in Kilinochchi) in depth to understand the extent of indebtedness. We found that the women had taken microfinance loans mainly to support their husbands to purchase fishing equipment. The villagers who had resettled after the war and had received grants to build houses were now mortgaging their land and homes, the only assets they now possessed after selling off their jewellery, to pay off the debts.

¹³Pawning loans peaked in 2012 and declined thereafter <http://www.ft.lk/article/502407/Sri-Lankan-banks-will-benefit-from-curbs-on-pawning--consumer-finance-loans--Moody-s>

¹⁴The Household Incomes and Expenditure Surveys conducted in 2012 and 2016 show that the poorest regions in the country are the North and East. Worst off were the northern districts of Mullaitivu and Kilinochchi, which were affected by the brutal last phase of the war, with poverty head counts of 29% and 13% in 2012/13 and 13% and 18% in 2016 respectively.

¹⁵Our research found that effective annual interest rates on loans with weekly payments are as high as 70% and loans with daily payments as high as 220%.

¹⁶Finance companies use public buildings, women's organisations and homes of village leaders as their collection points and to conduct transactions. When women fail to show up, collectors visit the homes of the debtors directly, often using threatening and abusive means, until

The desperate need for instant cash with ad hoc and falling rural incomes, the shame attached to being indebted and gendered extraction have only elicited limited forms of resistance. Tamil political representatives have not acknowledged or voiced concerns even when the problem of debt has led to tragic suicides in the North (Srinivasan, 2017c). The incidents are conveniently attributed to private conflicts and the lack of financial management by women, instead of seeing the issue as a debt-trap by the finance companies. The indebted people internalise individual blame and are unable to collectively respond to such financialised exploitation.

Land Struggles

Almost three decades of displacement, migration and return have led to tremendous disruption of social life centred on land in the North. Military occupation of private land, the normalisation of land titles and permits, squatters on lands of other displaced people and persistent landlessness of historically marginalised communities are some of the serious concerns of land tenure after the war.¹⁷ In this context, with the opening of democratic space amidst the mounting economic crisis, protests emerged to recover land for agriculture, landing sites for fisheries and land to rebuild devastated homes.

These struggles for land were focused on retrieving small plots of private land. Many of these displaced people had only lived on these lands for one or two generations and in some cases, for only a decade. However, for the protestors, these lands connect them to their past and provide a sense of belonging to a place and a secure future. Furthermore, these relatively small plots of land also provide sustenance in the form of home gardens for subsistence and marketing of produce such as coconuts and arecanuts.

In this context, some of the communities whose lands had been taken over by the security forces during the war decided to launch protests in early 2016. These non-violent protests involved camping out in front of the occupied lands and fasts on rotation. A prominent case was the land held by the air force in Kepapilavu; close to five hundred acres of land under occupation of some four hundred families, many of them settled there during the last decade of the war. These people have been displaced multiple times, including oppressed caste Up-Country Tamils,¹⁸ displaced decades earlier during the various riots in the South. Such protests spread to other parts of the region, with about fifty families in Pudukudiyiruppu, Mullaitivu and two dozen families in Paravipanchan, Kilinochchi also protesting against continued military occupation of their lands. A year later in 2017, three hundred fisher families of Iranaitivu, two small islands off Kilinochchi, demanded the release of their land occupied by the navy.

Some land problems relate to the workings of the state bureaucracy. Close to six hundred Tamil farmer families were displaced from southern Mullaitivu with the onset of war in the mid-1980s. During the war, Sinhala farmers were settled on their lands, now called Weli Oya, as part of a problematic military strategy of creating border villages as a buffer for the military during the war. The Tamil farmers having returned few years after the war, have been reasonable in demanding alternate land on the order of 4 acres for each farming household, who had owned as much as 5 to 10 acres of land before the war. However, the Mahaweli Authority¹⁹ with vast land powers has been rigid

the women pay back the amount by any means, including by borrowing from neighbours. We have encountered in our research women who are in hiding or temporarily relocated from their homes in order to escape the abuse by the finance companies.

¹⁷The authors visited several locations where ongoing land struggles were taking place, including against military-held private lands in Keppapilavu, Puthukkudiyiruppu, Iranaitivu, Mullikkulam, Valikamam North and Paravipanchan, farming lands taken away from the people in Weli Oya, Mullaitivu, conflicts over forest lands in Wilpattu and land for resettling Muslim communities in Jaffna. In this section we draw insights from our research on those land struggles.

¹⁸Up-country Tamils originating from estates in the South are a marginalised community in the North. Although the frictions between the communities were observable, similar to caste-relations in the North, a silence over their marginalization prevails. Although Up-country Tamils were also part of these emerging struggles for land, they voiced their conflicted feelings of hopelessness and desire to move back to the South.

¹⁹The accelerated Mahaweli Scheme, launched with the support of the World Bank in the late 1970s, is an extensive irrigation development project.

and insists it can only provide 2 acre plots, which the farmers deem inadequate for cultivation. There has been no progress on the matter despite persistent calls by the farmers for over three years.

Struggles for the release of land held by the military, land not returned due to the rigidity of state structures and land given over to Sinhalese families, often receive greater attention and the backing of nationalist forces. However, Tamil nationalist politicians could not fully control the protests by the people or shape the politics of the struggles. Thus the language adopted by such struggles did not contain the scripted messages of defiance and the rhetoric of anti-military slogans to merely strengthen their Tamil nationalist stance.

Land concerns of the Muslim minority in the North did not receive mainstream attention and in many cases there was active opposition to address their grievances. In Paracheriweli near Jaffna town, adjacent to the historically vibrant Muslim settlement that faced eviction by the LTTE²⁰, Muslim returnees have bought paddy land not used for decades to build houses after the war. However, local bureaucrats denied conversion of this paddy land to housing land even after Jaffna Muslims protested discrimination by Tamil officials on a range of resettlement concerns including housing grants.²¹

The silence on landlessness is significant. Currently, 14,000 households in the Jaffna District, close to 10% of its population, are completely landless and do not even qualify for the housing grants provided by the Government.²² Despite numerous reports and policy initiatives on resettlement, the state still lacks a policy to address landlessness.²³ However, movements to demand land for the landless are yet to emerge.

The new land policies in Sri Lanka to create a market for land and convert the permit lands of rural people to free holding land, will result in country-wide dispossession, including indebted farmers selling their lands to agri-businesses. Therefore, the challenges facing people excluded from land in the North are converging with the rest of the country. However, land struggles have remained isolated along regional and ethnic lines.

Fishing conflicts

The northern fishing community's mobilisations against Indian trawlers was one of the early post-war struggles. The increasing poaching by Indian trawlers has had a significant impact on Northern fishermen's incomes (Scholtens, Bavinck and Soosai, 2012). In addition to falling fish catch, putting their boats out on days when Indian bottom-trawlers cross into Sri Lankan waters results in irretrievable damages to their nets and even risking their lives by being overrun by the larger trawlers (Srinivasan, 2014). Furthermore, a drastic depletion of marine resources due to damaging fishing practices adopted by the bottom trawlers raised long-term concerns for small-scale fishers about the sustainability of their traditional coastal fishing practices (Amarasinghe and Kadirgamar, 2017). Although the Sri Lankan navy occasionally arrests the Indian trawlers, the numbers crossing borders are large. Given that the conflict involved fishermen from two countries, it also required diplomatic and policy interventions.

The fishing community in the North are marginalised both in Tamil politics and by caste hierarchies; the coastal castes are dominated by the land-owning Vellala caste who control the Tamil political parties. Tamil nationalist politics was silent on this issue in the hope of the Tamil Nadu Government in India backing their nationalist agenda.

²⁰The Muslims were forcefully evicted in 1990 by the LTTE, giving them only a few hours to vacate their properties. Having lived as refugees in Southern Sri Lanka for decades, they attempted to return after the war in 2009. Anti-Muslim sentiments and resistance to their return is strong in the North.

²¹We found that in this case it is the local Tamil bureaucrats, and not the Central Government authorities, who are hindering the resettlement of Muslim returnees.

²²District Secretariat, Jaffna.

²³Resettlement programmes target replacement of destroyed houses only, which excludes houses for the landless. The bureaucrats attribute landlessness to natural population growth and not as a result of historical exclusion of communities from land ownership.

Northern fishers are organised into strong co-operatives, with federations at the sub-district and district levels and an alliance at the provincial level. With such strong organisations the fishing cooperatives mobilised pressure on the state and eventually on Tamil Parliamentarians to initiate talks with the Indian Government. Their advocacy also drew national and international media attention. Talks between fishermen of both countries, a bill banning bottom-trawling in Sri Lanka and high-level talks between ministers of the two countries to find a long-term solution could be mentioned as some of their successes. The struggle against Indian bottom-trawlers had the support and backing of the Sri Lankan state, although the local Tamil politicians and the Tamil media did not raise the issue for the most part. While the fisher mobilisations were strong early on, with the prolonged conflict and mounting economic problems, the mobilisations steadily weakened.

In early 2015, a fishing conflict in the Mullaitivu district escalated between small-scale local fishermen and larger fishing enterprises from Southern Sri Lanka. Although Mullaitivu has a long history of seasonal migrant Southern fishers having amicable relations with the local fishing communities, granting excessive licences to migrant fishers and export companies, and illegal fishing practices led to this conflict. However, the resistance from the Mullaitivu fishing community has been weak and there is little solidarity from fishers of other parts of the North. Tamil nationalist propagandists attempted to use the conflict to whip up ethnic animosity and anti-military sentiments. The Mullaitivu fisher cooperatives were unable to launch an effective campaign to counter the problematic measures of the Fisheries Ministry or shift the stance of the Tamil politicians towards solving their problems.

While small-scale fishing communities face challenges in safe-guarding their traditional livelihoods throughout Sri Lanka, commercial fisheries development is becoming the priority. Fisheries policies and development plans are focused on deep sea fishing and export markets. With increased attention on Northern fisheries, the Asian Development Bank initiated a major fisheries development project for the region focused on the construction of a large fisheries harbour for deep sea fishing. Such large-scale infrastructure projects, excludes those engaged in small-scale fishing and ignores the need for investments to uplift their livelihoods. Small-scale fishers are likely to be undermined with high fish catch landings by the large deep sea vessels. However, such development projects impacting small-scale fisher livelihoods, have not elicited significant resistance.

Politics of Post-war Struggles

The above struggles strategically used the democratic space that opened after regime change in 2015. However, these struggles remained fragmented, by location and issue. For the most part, they failed to build solidarity with other struggles in the region and social movements in the rest of the country. Their politics was limited to appealing, lobbying and negotiating with the state. Furthermore, the nationalist framing, neoliberal character of the projects and populist measures that were at the heart of these issues were rarely challenged.

We believe scale is important for emancipatory politics as social change has to be at the macro level. In this context, the fisheries struggle against Indian trawlers, in contrast to the other three issues highlighted in this paper, was able to scale up from the concerns of village level fisheries co-operative societies, to a regional struggle and to one of national concern. Here, unlike the land struggles which were local in character, the microfinance and housing issues were problems of a macro scale. However, neither did a national movement against predatory micro-finance schemes emerge, nor did a provincial level movement rise out of the over one hundred thousand households that expected the 65,000 houses.

These struggles failed to build inter-regional and inter-ethnic solidarity. While not all struggles can be scaled up through an issue based social movement such as the fisher cooperatives, they could have gained greater strength through creating solidarity by framing issues along caste, gender and broader concerns of oppressed sections of society. For example, the struggles to release military occupied

private lands of marginalised communities could have built a broader social movement on land and landlessness.

While the struggles discussed in this paper differ significantly, one common thread is that all of them appealed to the state to intervene; to address their need for restoring land and housing, to safeguard their livelihoods and to curtail the finance companies' exploitative practices. Alternate means of addressing issues such as direct action were not attempted. For example, with the exception of the fishing communities that captured Indian trawlers in two instances (Scholtens et al., 2012), there were no direct confrontations. Village communities rarely confronted the abuse of finance company collectors. The struggles mainly sought solutions through negotiations with the state. While the people protested and put pressure, the solutions in the form of elite deal-making were often devoid of the people's genuine representation. Furthermore, the people involved in the struggles did not explore autonomous social initiatives such as to build decent housing for their own marginalised communities. One of the few exceptions were the efforts of credit co-operatives to provide low interest loans for war-affected women. The politics of appealing to and depending on the state are easily diverted into patronage politics, with little space for charting an alternative vision.

Although some issues fundamentally contradict the ideological orientation of the ruling regimes and hegemonic regional actors, the politics of these struggles have failed to strongly critique and confront nationalist, neoliberal and populist programmes. For example, the campaign against the prefab housing project was essentially about challenging a neoliberal reconstruction programme. However, the alternative also sort a financialised solution – raising the necessary finances by issuing of bonds in the local capital markets as opposed to foreign financing from a multi-national bank – characteristic of neoliberal development projects.

The limitations of these recent struggles raise questions about the possibilities for emancipatory forms of politics. While these struggles have not found widespread solidarity nor transformed local issues into macro-level concerns, the active organising efforts have exposed the long suppressed historical and structural forms of oppression in the North. Simmering underneath the surface of such struggles are internal tensions; frictions in land struggles based on levels and lack of ownership, fishing communities varied by caste and gendered forms of dispossession with micro-finance. Could such subtle internal tensions turn into organised resistance and contribute to new forms of progressive politics?

Reserves of Resistance

The vibrant history of social institutions and movements in the North are a reserve for democratic politics and resistance. Co-operatives, community centres and women's organisations, are present in every village and are federated in each region, and have the capacity to become powerful spaces for organising resistance. Furthermore, caste, gender and class oppression in the North have also met with resistance at different historical moments.

Progressive movements and anti-caste politics

Historically, challenges to Tamil nationalist politics came from progressive movements. First, there were the mobilisations of the Jaffna Youth Congress, which is considered the first anti-colonial people's movement in the Sri Lanka (S. Kadirgamar, 1980). During its tenure in the 1920s it focused on indigenisation, in both promoting the vernacular languages and cultural practices, took an all-island anti-colonial politics as opposed to a narrowly Tamil nationalist politics, and was one of the first movements in the North to reject caste exclusion. In subsequent decades, many of its founders joined the Left movement in Sri Lanka and continued to support progressive struggles. In the post-colonial decades, it was the left movement and the anti-caste movement that were major challenges to Tamil nationalism. The Communist Party took the lead in the anti-caste struggles in the late 1960s and

1970s, greatly reducing the caste exclusion practice of untouchability.²⁴ However, the left movement was decimated and trade unions were considerably weakened during the war in the North.

Caste in the post-war context continues to be an important determinant of social and economic life in the northern region, and is at the core of social exclusion and the lack of meaningful political representation. Caste exclusion is tied to landed agricultural relations and the spatial configuration of villages, including of local social institutions; subtle forms of caste exclusion continues in accessing social institutions such as temples, community centres and schools. While the war with displacement from village life led to the weakening of caste relations, resettlement in their original village quarters after the war is re-establishing caste relations. However, caste exclusion in contemporary times works through stealth with an overwhelming silence on discussing caste. The local state bureaucracy consisting of Tamil officials subtly reinforce caste exclusion in local infrastructure buildout by denying access to water, electricity and roads for oppressed caste communities.

In 2016, a new caste confrontation emerged in some parts of Jaffna, particularly in oppressed caste villages in proximity to upper caste cemeteries. These poorly maintained cemeteries, where some encroachment by landless oppressed caste people had also taken place, became sites of confrontation. After the war, the upper castes living elsewhere insisted on burning their dead in these cemeteries which had remained idle for years. The open pyres are a health hazard with smoke going into the neighbouring houses and animals running around with body parts. The confrontations around the cemeteries have broken the silence on caste in Jaffna.

The cemetery struggles coinciding with the fiftieth anniversary commemorations of the anti-caste struggles launched in October 1966 have initiated broader discussions on the new forms of caste exclusion. Some of these contemporary forums are led by left activists who were part of the anti-caste struggles decades ago and are contributing to writings on anti-caste politics in the public domain.²⁵

A nascent contemporary women's rights movement

The women's movement began with anti-colonial mobilisations and agitations for women's franchise, in late colonial and early post-colonial period (De Alwis and Jayawardena, 2001). The launch of socialist women's movement emerged as early as 1947. With the shift towards industrial production in export processing zones and large numbers of women workers being employed in factory work, plantations and as migrant labour, women workers' organisations and trade union participation also became a prominent feature of women's activism in Sri Lanka (Kurian and Jayawardena, 2016).

Women bore much of the social burden of the protracted war, caring for their dependents and making ends meet. In this context, women were also part of the subtle forms of resistance to the war. While, Tamil women did join armed militant groups including the LTTE as trained fighters, many of the anti-war efforts and movements formed across ethnic lines (Samuel, 2006), and advocacy on war-time concerns relating to detainees, disappeared persons, displacements, curfews and sexual violence were organised by women.²⁶ While such women's work was dismantled with the LTTE's totalitarian control of Tamil society, women's networks continued to be important to oppose child recruitment by the LTTE. A number of feminists who critiqued the LTTE and Tamil nationalism, paid with their lives during the war.²⁷

In the post-war context, a gendered oppressive discourse of cultural deterioration is being deployed. Women's bodies are the subject of new mechanisms of social control; from restricting their dress to freedom of movement, and deepening forms of religious and cultural practices that subject them to

²⁴ Untouchability in Jaffna was characterised by exclusionary practices in public places such as temples and tea shops. The anti-caste struggles of that period focused on temple entry and equal seating in public places.

²⁵ Two of these important works include, S. K. Senthivel's *Vaddukottaiyil Irunthu Mullaitivu Warai (From Vaddukottai to Mullaitivu)*, 2017, and N. Raveendran's *Saathi Samuha Varalaatril Varkka Porattangal (Class Struggles in a Caste Social History)*,

²⁶ Women's organisations such as Purani, a women's shelter and centre, and the Mother's Front an anti-war movement, in their opposition to the war also questioned the Tamil nationalist push.

²⁷ Marxist feminist Rajani Thiranagama and feminist poet Selvy were murdered by the LTTE.

fasting and temple going. Even as such gendered disciplining continues, Tamil nationalist discourse claims to save women and protect them.

In reality, women and increasingly single women, find little social support and have to care for their children and elderly parents after the war, even as they attempt to eke out a living. While their social burden increases, the social services and protection including subsidies they receive have been declining with the cuts to social welfare. Their desperation for survival is further exploited, by the microfinance and self-employment schemes discussed above.

Women's participation in the formal labour force in the North is considerably smaller than other regions. However, women are part of the informal sector, in various livelihood initiatives and in recent years increasingly the main participants in the new local industries. In this context, women are severely exploited in the seafood factories and new garment factories in various part of the North. Some of the few labour strikes witnessed in the North after the war were by the women workers in garment factories in Mannar and Killinochchi.

Recent discussions and mobilisations amongst women's networks have been around social welfare interventions.²⁸ Women's Societies, Women's Rural Development Societies (WRDS)²⁹ and women involved in co-operatives are increasingly becoming vocal about the economic predicament. Such women's protests, rarely covered in the Tamil media, provides an important critique of the state's economic policies and exploitation by private businesses.

The reflexive feminist discourses and the extensive structure of women's institutions point to possibilities for an emergent women's rights movement. Some of the honest reflective writings about the war have been produced by women (Tamilini, 2016; Tamilkavi, 2014). Furthermore, the recent forms of women's labour struggles and protests for social protection provide the impetus for a nascent women's rights movement.

Co-operatives and economic democracy

The co-operatives have made a significant contribution to the social and economic development of northern society. While they do not have a history of militant politics and have often worked with state institutions and the local societal structures without much confrontation, they have also extended to sections of society marginalised by mainstream Tamil society, particularly along caste lines. Therefore, the role of the Fisheries Co-operatives and Palm Development Co-operatives have been central to raising the concerns of the fishing and toddy tapping caste communities. Similarly, thrift and credit co-operative societies have a majority of women members.

In this context, neoliberal policies backed by the state and funded by donors and Tamil nationalist politics undermine such social institutions. Recent neoliberal development initiatives focus on livelihood and self-employment schemes for individuals resulting in the further atomisation of individuals to the detriment of social institutions. The Northern Provincial Council, which has administrative powers over the co-operatives have been manipulating them for their narrow nationalist political propaganda purposes.

The rejuvenation of the co-operative movement, as primary rural social institutions, is crucial for ensuring the space of economic democracy. Co-operatives have a vast membership³⁰ through which they democratically elect their leadership and if they become vocal can check the Tamil nationalist disregard for rural economic concerns. The workings of co-operatives are antithetical to neoliberalism; any accumulation is invested in the community as opposed to benefiting private capital accumulation, and they neutralise the ravages of the market by linking production and distribution through the vast

²⁸ Changes to the recipients list of Government's main poverty reduction programme, many of whom are women, resulted in protests in front of Divisional Secretariat offices in the North. The Samurdhi programme targets families falling below the poverty-line and offers cash transfers and special loan schemes. Research among women recipients of the programme revealed that the women view it as a social protection payment they can fall back on when incomes and employment are precarious, rather than as a poverty alleviation programme.

²⁹ Women's Societies and Women's Rural Development Societies (WRDS) in the North are currently some of the most active village level structures in the country, with federated structures at district levels.

³⁰ Cooperatives in the Northern Province have a membership of approximately 400,000 out of a total population of 1.1 million.

co-operative networks. Furthermore, cooperatives are a check on the atomisation of individuals including the neoliberal policies of self-employment and entrepreneurship. However, there is always the danger of co-operatives being co-opted by the state through populist programmes, and that danger needs to be checked by other sources of active politics, including by radical sections of their membership.

In northern Sri Lanka, there are reserves of resistance in the broad foundation of social institutions and progressive movements, particularly the historically strong anti-caste movement and the nascent women's rights movement. While the cooperative movement is ideally situated to confront neoliberal policies, it needs to be confronted and strengthened by anti-caste and feminist politics in order to withstand the populist moves by the state and the ideological manoeuvres of Tamil nationalism. We claim that it is the dynamic interaction of progressive networks of social institutions and militant politics disrupting oppressive social structures that are the elements of any future emancipatory politics.

Conclusion

The global economic crisis of 2008 and the major shift in global politics with the resurgence of nationalist regimes have brought to the fore questions about neoliberalism and authoritarian populism. While both neoliberalism and authoritarian populism, have been theorised primarily on the shifts in the West in the late 1970s and more recently in 2008, we argue for a longer historical arc of the emergence of contemporary forms of neoliberalism, nationalism, populism and authoritarianism. We problematize this periodisation with a post-colonial perspective that traces the workings of such political economic processes back to the 1950s. Our analysis grounded in Sri Lanka and its war-torn Northern Province argues for understanding neoliberalism, nationalism, populism and authoritarianism, as historically contingent, inter-related and fluid political economic processes rather than any chronological, sequential and distinct political economic changes.

Neoliberal accumulation is subject to problems of legitimacy and resistance. Furthermore, neoliberal restructuring requires authoritarian state power to strengthen market structures and dismantle any social resistance. However, neoliberalism is unable to ensure legitimacy in the context of rising inequalities and mounting dispossession. And in such moments, neoliberal regimes draw on nationalism, to provide political legitimacy; both to build affinity towards the nation, in the sense of an imagined community (Anderson, 2006), and to deflect disaffection through the construction of the 'other', including minorities, immigrants and enemy nations. Nevertheless, challenges mount and are aggravated over time as neoliberalism leads to deepening and repeated economic crises.

The political response to crises can be fractured and localised, and the solutions sought can be more for survival rather than for transformative change. This is all the more so in rural contexts, where struggles can remain geographically isolated and issue-based without forging broader movements of solidarity for macro change. Survival politics focused on negotiations with the state, can result in handouts and patronage. In such cases, struggles are managed on a piecemeal basis by the state and the status quo can continue for long periods of time.

In this context, when some struggles against neoliberalism reach national proportions, authoritarian populist regimes emerge to meet the resistance with autocratic state power and deflect fundamental economic problems with populist measures. The solution becomes the figure of an authoritarian leader with top-down appeal to the popular realm; supposedly to address the day to day concerns of the people. Authoritarian state power is often characteristic of both authoritarian populist regimes and neoliberal regimes. However, the economic approach can diverge in the case of populist and neoliberal policies; populist measures can contradict the neoliberal emphasis on free markets and atomised individual agents.

Resistance politics have different challenges depending on the politics of the regimes it is confronting. In the case of neoliberalism, struggles can emerge with rising inequalities, widespread dispossession

and repeated economic crises. Similarly, nationalist regimes also can face opposition when the regime fails to economically and politically strengthen the “nation”. The shift towards authoritarian populism creates challenges of resisting both political and economic forms of power with popular appeal, while confronting a consolidated authoritarian regime that has captured state power.

From the vantage point of northern Sri Lanka, we argue that confronting neoliberalism and nationalism requires a broader economic project, but one which cannot be appropriated by populism. Thus struggles questioning the homogenising of communities, whether it be of nationalism or of populism, is crucial to such resistance politics. We argue, the elements of an emancipatory politics have to be constituted through democratic forms of organising challenging authoritarianism, macro-economic programmes providing egalitarian alternatives and militant restructuring of social relations. In the case of post-war northern Sri Lanka, we see the reserve for such emancipatory politics in the combination of a co-operative alternative with militant caste and gender politics. We acknowledge that depending on context, it may be a different combination of democratic movements, macroeconomic alternatives and radical initiatives for social change.

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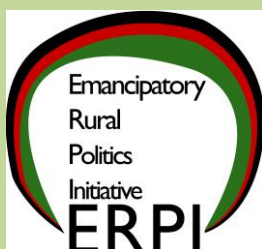
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The Emancipatory Rural Politics Initiative (ERPI) is a new initiative focused on understanding the contemporary moment and building alternatives. New exclusionary politics are generating deepening inequalities, jobless 'growth', climate chaos, and social division. The ERPI is focused on the social and political processes in rural spaces that are generating alternatives to regressive, authoritarian politics. We aim to provoke debate and action among scholars, activists, practitioners and policymakers from across the world that are concerned about the current situation, and hopeful about alternatives.

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