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Claiming land in heterogenous bureaucracies: The daily labor and decadal cycles of land rights movements in Karnataka, India

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ABSTRACT

This article examines how indigenous communities in India who are excluded from existing legal provisions for land rights devise alternative strategies to claim rights to land and resources. Focusing on the six-decade-long struggle of two indigenous communities, the Hakki Pikki and the Iruliga, to regularize their land tenure in the southern Indian state of Karnataka, the article analyses how claims to land are negotiated in contexts of legal exclusion. The Hakki Pikki and Iruliga communities were selected as a case study because their prolonged occupation of land without formal title, and their ongoing struggles for legal recognition, reflect challenges that are widely shared by indigenous communities across India. This study is based on ethnographic and archival research and draws on data from three months of participant observation, 35 semi-structured interviews conducted through purposive sampling, and a thematic analysis of 259 government documents. Drawing on anthropological theories of institutional pluralism and territorialization, as well as empirical observations of communities' everyday strategies of claiming land, the study finds that community members do not reject state apparatuses but instead employ "mirroring" strategies of land claiming, using state-created legal frameworks to demonstrate the legitimacy of their claims against the state. The study concludes that two sets of processes are central to securing land rights: first, communities' ability to discern and leverage the heterogeneity of the state by simultaneously engaging multiple legal regimes; and second, the emergence of a cooperative ethic between two distinct indigenous groups based on novel land sharing arrangements.

1. Introduction

Historically, Indian forest policies and land laws have been inadequate in providing rights to indigenous communities. Through a series of exclusionary colonial and postcolonial policies, indigenous and other forest-dwelling communities in India have been systematically denied access to the natural resources that have sustained their livelihoods and sustenance (Rangarajan and Shahabuddin, 2006; Xaxa, 2019). Not only have state policies lacked in providing adequate access to land and resource rights for marginalized communities, but state institutions have also deliberately worked to ignore and erase land rights of indigenous communities (Aggarwal et al., 2009; Sarin, 2005). Beginning in the 1960s, in multiple states across the country, lands that were under customary tenures started being classified as government forest land, without settling the rights of the communities that were already occupying the land. This automatically rendered these communities as encroachers of the land they customarily occupied (see Fig. 1).

Simultaneously, in the 1960s, the Government of India began

advocating a policy of resettlement for nomadic communities, under which nomadic tribes were given tracts of agricultural land to farm and encouraged to settle into sedentary lifestyles in rural areas. The push for settling nomadic communities into sedentary lifestyles stemmed from the global impetus in post-colonial states to "eliminate a way of life that was considered economically and culturally backward" (Elamin, 2018: 79). The Hakki Pikki, a semi-nomadic forest dwelling tribe in the state of Karnataka, were one of the few communities who were caught in the crosshairs of these two policy thrusts that were underway at the time.

On the one hand, the Hakki Pikki were encouraged by the state to transition from hunting to agriculture, as it was seen to be a more 'stable' forms of livelihood. To incentivize this transition, in 1962 the government created the 'Hakki Pikki Colony'; a resettlement colony located in rural southern Karnataka. The Hakki Pikkis brought in the Iruligas, another forest dwelling tribe, to co-occupy the colony. Both communities were promised 350 acres of land to cultivate, and a separate 15-acre colony was built for them to reside in, adjacent to the agricultural land. On the other hand, in 1974, the Bannerghatta national park

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was demarcated and the land their colony was located on fell within park bounds, instantly criminalizing both communities. The agricultural land they were promised was never transferred to them and their colony remained an encroachment by law. After five decades of negotiation and agitation, in 2023, the colony residents achieved a partial victory as a portion of their land was finally distributed to some households in the colony. Specifically, 228 out of the 350 acres of agricultural land were transferred to 114 families in the colony, with each family receiving 2 acres of land, 62 years later than promised.

The six-decade long land rights movement has involved continuous negotiations and contestations between colony residents and state actors. Since the governance of the multiple land-uses that occupy these fragmented landscapes is, both formally and informally, divided between multiple state departments at varying scales, the Hakki Pikki and Iruliga's struggle for land rights interfaces simultaneously with multiple arms of the state. In Karnataka, land governance is primarily administered by the Forest Department and the Revenue Department, with all land officially falling under the jurisdiction of one of these two agencies. Within the Hakki Pikki colony, both departments exercise control over different tracts of land. However, since the colony's establishment in the 1960s, jurisdictional boundaries between these departments have remained ambiguous, compelling residents to engage repeatedly with both agencies to resolve land-related claims. A third key actor, the Tribal Welfare Department, functions as the nodal agency for tribal development and the protection of tribal rights. As a result of this heterogeneous governance structure, decisions concerning land rights in the Hakki Pikki colony necessarily involve simultaneous negotiation with multiple arms of the state.

During these six decades, both colony residents as well as state actors have used various strategies to mark their ownership of the land and its resources. Moreover, the struggle continues till date to transfer the remaining 122 acres of agricultural land and to regularize the residential colony in which they reside. Scholars and practitioners have widely noted that the land rights of tribal communities across India are frequently undermined by the absence of formal land ownership documentation (cite; cite). In this respect, the circumstances of the Hakki Pikki and Iruliga communities, characterized by the lack of legal titles to the land they live on and sustained efforts to secure formal recognition, are not exceptional but broadly representative of the challenges faced by

many indigenous groups across the country.

Scholarship on resource rights and land governance has paid close attention to the systems of institutional pluralism that undergird land-claiming processes, especially in post-colonial societies (Lund, 2011; Sikor and Lund, 2009). Such systems are characterized by a multiplicity of institutions and actors, each driven by diverging motives, norms, and mandates. While competition and contradiction within bureaucratic apparatus can be a hindrance for communities seeking to navigate this apparatus, scholars have also demonstrated that the 'fuzziness' of boundaries between different arms of the state can also have a productive dimension for communities seeking to claim rights (Hirsch et al., 2011; Ratnam, 2017). The diverging mandates within the state might be more beneficial for communities than dealing with an internally cohesive state agency because these divergences can be leveraged in meaningful ways. This paper explores the strategies employed by both indigenous communities and state bodies in India in exerting their claims over land, how these strategies intersect with each other, and how these strategies reconfigure indigenous communities' relationships with each other and with the state.

This study finds that two sets of processes emerge as key to ensuring the success of the movement: one, local communities' ability to discern and leverage the heterogeneity of the state apparatus by simultaneously appealing to different legal regimes to further their goals and two, the emergence of a cooperative ethic between two distinct indigenous groups based on novel land sharing arrangements. Further, the study finds that maps and lists emerge as two key artefacts in the land-claiming process. An examination of the process of creating maps that delineate the expanse of land being claimed and lists that specify which households are eligible to receive land reveals that the end-goal of both processes is not to generative alternative systems of designating land ownership, but to use documents and formats that are recognized by the state and modify them to reflect indigenous communities' claims over the land. The multiple iterations of both mapping and list-making exercises creates space for multiple actors, both state and non-state, rightful claimants and illegal ones, to contest existing land ownership patterns and propose modification that benefit their own interests.

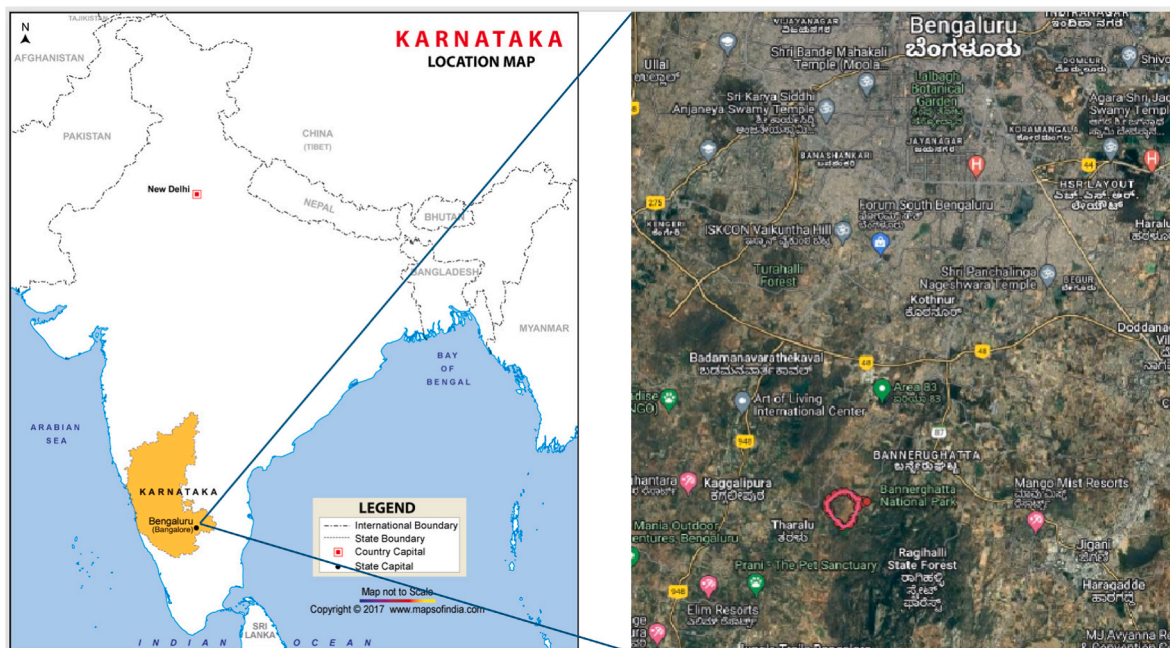


Fig. 1. Map of Karnataka and location of 'Hakki Pikki Colony'; the resettlement colony that is currently co-occupied by both Hakki Pikki and Iruligas.

2. Theoretical framework

To describe the socio-political landscape within which the Hakki Pikkis and the Iruligas are articulating their claims to land, this article engages anthropological theory of institutional pluralism. The concept of institutional or legal pluralism, first discussed by Griffiths (1986) and later developed further by other scholars of legal anthropology (Merry, 1988; Tamanha, 2000; Von Benda-Beckmann & Von Benda-Beckmann, 2006), posits that different legal orders, including systems of both state and customary law, coexist within any social field, and are each driven by motives and actions that can both complement and frustrate one another. This article draws on more recent anthropological scholarship that discusses the concept of institutional pluralism specifically in the context of land claiming and land governance (Sikor and Lund, 2009; Lund, 2011).

Lund (2011) argues that within pluralistic bureaucracies, competing idioms and practices marshalled by various institutions in their attempts to establish, reproduce and institutionalize their legitimacy and authority. Importantly, scholarship on institutional pluralism does not posit the state as “a once coherent whole, which is subsequently pluralized and fragmented”; rather, the state is recognized as “a range of competing institutions, endowed with different resources, which engage in the co-production of property and political subjects” (Lund, 2011, 887). Institutional pluralism is a major cause of land conflict, particularly in the global south (Kalabamu, 2019; Sikor and Lund, 2009). This phenomenon frequently results in contradictions and friction between state law and customary regulations (Koning et al., 2008).

Within Indian forest and land governance too scholars have recognized the prevalence of institutional pluralism, as the alignment of individual state agents into “a single, coordinated collective agent” is a rare occurrence, and “state institutions often not only do not coordinate but even act at cross-purposes” (Vaidya, 2022, 51). Crucially, as Sundar (2012) notes, within Indian environmental governance, legal pluralism is not merely characterized by a parallelism between state and non-state legal systems but also manifests as multiple orders within state law itself. This article grounds ethnographic observations of the everyday processes of land-claiming in theory on institutional pluralism to call attention to how a heterogeneous state apparatus, which is characteristic of so many postcolonial societies, influencing of and negotiated by a particular community’s claims to land.

Further, this article draws on the concept of territorialization to understand the land-claiming process that both state and non-state actors participate in. Territorialization is the process of “excluding or including people within particular geographic boundaries, and about controlling what people do and their access to natural resources within those boundaries” (Vandergest and Peluso, 1995: 388). Building on Vandergest and Peluso’s seminal work, a rich body of scholarship advanced the theory to examine how state processes of territorialization are complicated, contradicted, and resisted by various governmental and non-governmental actors (Corson, 2011; Scott, 1998; Sivar-amakrishnan, 1997). While this body of work saw acts of territorialization primarily as the purview of the state, enacted with the goal of consolidating state power, later scholarship also began to underscore “local” territorialization practices and processes that are deployed by non-state actors to assert their own claims to land (Peluso, 2005).

Recent scholarship has drawn on Peluso’s (2005) theories of local territorialization to discuss different manifestations of the process occurring from the bottom-up. Framed as ‘counter-territorialization’ (Lestrelin, 2011), ‘territorialization from below’ (Lund and Rachman, 2018), and ‘territorialization at the grassroots’ (Kan and Chen, 2021), these scholars all draw attention to actions among non-state actors that not only challenge state practices of territorialization but also establish their own claims to access and control land within or between existing territorialization projects. The aim of this paper is to understand the land claiming process as a practice situated within a system of institutional pluralism, where both state and non-state practices of territorialization

emerge and interact with each other and the broader institutional landscape. In this context, Hakki Pikki and Iruliga practices of land claiming can be understood as specific forms of local territorialization that have emerged in response to and in conversation with the state.

Scholarship on indigenous resource rights in India has largely focused on the potential and limitations of the Forest Rights Act (FRA) as a mechanism for claiming rights (Bijoy, 2017; Lele, 2017). While the FRA has been instrumental in securing rights for many forest-dependent communities, it offers limited provisions for nomadic and semi-nomadic groups. Consequently, the rights-claiming practices of communities excluded from the FRA’s purview have received little scholarly attention. This study addresses this gap by examining the land-claiming strategies of such communities, who must identify and pursue alternative avenues to assert their rights outside the framework of the FRA. By analysing how these communities navigate a heterogeneous state apparatus and employ creative strategies to secure access to land, the study contributes also holds relevance for indigenous and forest-dwelling communities globally that face similar exclusions from formal legal regimes.

3. Methods

The land rights movement in the Hakki Pikki Colony is spearheaded by a committee of tribal leaders, officially known as the ‘Hakki Pikki and Iruliga Tribal Society’ and referred to colloquially simply as ‘the committee’. The committee is supported by the Society of Informal Education and Development Studies (SIEDS), a local NGO that has been assisting colony residents since the 1980s. This study is based on ethnographic and archival research conducted between August 2023 and May 2025. The primary data presented is drawn from three months of participant observation and interviews conducted in Monsoon (2024). This is supplemented by secondary archival data analysis of all documentations of the land rights case over the past six decades, the paper records of which have been maintained by SIEDS for the past four decades.

In 2024, I began volunteering with SIEDS to support the Hakki Pikki Colony’s land rights agitations, which gave me the opportunity to accompany NGO workers and committee members on their daily tasks of furthering the land claiming process. Participant observation entailed attending weekly meetings of the committee; accompanying SIEDS and committee members for meetings with various government officials; assisting SIEDS and committee members in mapping colony lands, preparing land claims, and outlining strategies to formalize land claims; and simply spending time in the colony getting to know its residents and their histories. This process of “deep hanging out” (Geertz, 1998) allowed me to not only learn about the colony’s decades long struggle for land but also recognize the broader socio-political and cultural histories of both communities that have been instrumental in shaping the struggle for land.

In addition to the data gleaned from participant observation, 35 semi-structured interviews were conducted, each lasting between 30 and 90 min. Of these 35 interviews, 20 were with Hakki Pikki and Iruliga community members, 8 with government officials from the Forest, Revenue, and Tribal Welfare departments, 3 with SIEDS members, and 4 with subject matter experts. The names of all interviewees have been changed to pseudonyms to protect the identities of the research participants. Interviewees were selected using a purposive sampling strategy focused on individuals with firsthand experience of land rights formalization. Among colony residents, this included individuals who were members of the tribal committee as well as those who had interacted closely with committee members while pursuing their own land titles. Government officials were selected based on their engagement with the Hakki Pikki and Iruliga communities, or with other groups in Karnataka involved in struggles over the formalization of land and resource rights. While this approach enabled in-depth engagement with key actors and processes, it necessarily limited the generalizability of the findings.

All interviewees provided verbal consent to be included in the study, with the understanding that their contributions to the study would be completely anonymized. The interviews were conducted in Kannada, the official language of Karnataka, and focused on the history of the land rights movement and the learnings gleaned from it. As a native Kannada speaker, I was able to conduct, transcribe, and translate all interviews myself, which helped build trust and avoid misinterpretation. As the agitation for land rights is an ongoing struggle, with multiple cases still ongoing in the state courts, most participants were uncomfortable with their interviews being audio recorded. Hence, all interviews were recorded through hand-written notes, written largely in Kannada to capture original quotes accurately, and then translated to English while transcribing the notes digitally. While this did slow down the interviews, particularly during the process of noting down phrases I wanted to quote, it allowed participants to share information with comfort and ease. All quotes in this manuscript are drawn only from phrases noted down verbatim during the interview process. The digital transcripts were analyzed through inductive coding, to allow for a bottom-up emergence of themes and sub-themes within the data.

Ethnographic data collection was supplemented with archival data analysis of correspondences, legal documents, and government orders related to the Hakki Pikki Colony land rights movement. As I was working with SIEDS, I was able to access their compendium of records related to the case, which have not been made available in the public domain. Through the SIEDS archive, I analyzed 259 sets of documents, mostly consisting of communications, either between the committee and various government departments, or between various department and officials within the government. This archival data was processed through a thematic analysis and triangulated with data from interviews and participant observation.

As a volunteer for SIEDS, I was entering relationships with both colony residents and state officials from the standpoint of an NGO worker, which continually played a part in the conversations I was privy to. While my association with SIEDS allowed me to gain trust rapidly among most families in the community, owing to the organization's longstanding credibility in the colony, it also led to a degree of wariness among a few families and government officials who were critical of SIEDS's approach. Further, as I grew more involved in the work of furthering colony residents' land rights claims, I sought to navigate the tension between being a researcher *of* and a participant *in* the land-claiming process by recording such tensions in field notes, engaging in critical discussions with colleagues, and revisiting these reflections during data analysis.

4. Analysis and discussion

4.1. State territorialization

The process of demarcating control over specific tracts of land has been understood and theorized by scholars of resource governance as the practice of territorialization, which is a process that is carried out in formal and informal capacities by both state and non-state actors. This section examines state strategies of territorialization within and around the Hakki Pikki colony. The two arms of the state that are most closely involved in the land rights struggle are the Revenue Department, which governs all non-forest land in the country, and the Forest Department. As the colony land initially fell within the jurisdiction of the forest department, in order for colony residents to get land titles, the land needed to first be transferred from the Forest to the Revenue Department and then transferred to individual landowners. While colony residents have clashed with officials from both departments, a majority of their contestations occurs with the Forest Department. In part, this is because the land rights movement seeks to transfer land ownership away from the forest department. However, an additional cause for conflict is contestations over boundary-making, which is largely driven by differences between how the two departments mark out their jurisdictions

and their mandates.

The presence of the Revenue Department in a landscape is always quite apparent. As they are the agency in charge of record keeping, all land-use changes, land transfers, land conflicts, and any other decisions over land management must be routed through them. The jurisdiction of the Forest Department, on the other hand, is not as clearly visible. While large tracts of land are designated as forest area, the department does not actively maintain management activities on every tract of forest land. As a result of this difference, while the Revenue Department is not as concerned with identifying their jurisdictions, the Forest Department does feel the need to demarcate their territorial claims.

The forest department demonstrates their claim to the land through physical markers such as fencing, where the department has installed electrified fences along the boundary between forest and colony land. While the stated purpose of the fencing is to protect the colony land from elephants, deer, and other wildlife that can destroy the crops, it also serves the dual purpose of visibly marking out Forest Department territory. Further, this boundary is a contested one, as the colony residents have repeatedly demonstrated that the fencing encroaches on agricultural land that has been granted to them. Another physical claim to land by the Forest Department is to plant trees across a stretch of land. Under the Godavarman judgement, a significant ruling by the Supreme Court of India in 1996, any land that meets the dictionary definition of a "forest", which entails any land with significant tree cover, falls under the management of the Forest Department. Hence, planting trees on a piece of land legitimates forest department control over the land.

In the 2000s, the Forest Department established a 50-acre Eucalyptus plantation in the middle of the 350 acres of agricultural land that colony residents were agitating for. This plantation encroaches on 18 out of the 114 titles distributed in 2023, as a result of which these 18 families cannot cultivate their land until the Eucalyptus trees are removed. The Eucalyptus plantation had been established as part of the Forest Department's Social Forestry program; an initiative introduced in the 1970s to address the dual concerns of forest loss and the declining availability of timber. The Social Forestry program aimed to address these issues by reclaiming wastelands through afforestation, generating rural employment, and producing firewood to meet the needs of local communities (Poffenberger, 2000; Ravindranath et al., 1996). Eucalyptus became a popular choice of tree crop because of its fast-growing nature and high market value. However, these exotic monoculture plantations soon began to invite criticism from local communities and NGOs because they harmed native biodiversity, they did not produce the expected returns on investment, and their short rotation felling cycle contributed to furthering degradation of the land (Ravindranath et al., 1996; Saxena, 1992). Since the introduction of this exotic species represented "ecological frames with which local communities do not identify" (Poffenberger, 2000: 99), they were widely rejected by the communities they were supposed to be adopted by.

The act of planting trees, especially Eucalyptus, to claim land is a strategy that is commonly exercised by the forest department in other parts of the country too. Ratnam (2017) describes how during contestations over land between tribal communities and the state in Madhya Pradesh, the Forest Department deliberately plants Eucalyptus trees as a way to mark certain land as belonging to them. Eucalyptus is likely to be the most popular choice because its fast-growing nature allows the plantation to be quickly established, thus making it a quick way to exert claim over land, and its value as a timber crop also makes it a profitable investment. Over here, the state plays a dual contradictory role of both distribution and dispossession (D'Costa and Chakraborty, 2017; Jonnalagadda et al., 2021), where on the one hand it is 'distributing' or 'giving' land to incentivize the community to transition from nomadism to agriculture, but on the other hand it is 'dispossessing' or 'taking' it away through encroachments such as this.

4.2. Local territorialization

In direct opposition to the Forest Department, the colony residents clear the land and cultivate crops to claim the space as theirs. The very first act of claiming the land, when the first Hakki Pikki families arrived in 1965, was to clear some areas of vegetation and begin building homes. However, despite having built homes, the nomadic traditions of the Hakki Pikki were difficult legacies to leave behind. The traditional occupation of the Hakki Pikki community was hunting, and the tribe was particularly well known for being bird catchers. As they were not accustomed to cultivating land, they began resorting to familiar habits of hunting or seeking alms to secure food, which meant they would abandon the colony and retreat into the forests for months at a go. The Forest Department, however, often viewed their absence as an opportunity to reclaim the colony land and would often move back to managing the land while the Hakki Pikki were gone.

Witnessing this dynamic, a sympathetic government officer at the time advised the Hakki Pikki that if the colony continued to remain unoccupied for long stretches of time, the Forest Department would reclaim it permanently. However, since he knew it was in their nature to migrate, he went on to suggest that they look for other tribes who would be willing to co-occupy the colony and guard it against incursions by the Forest Department. On his suggestion, the Hakki Pikki sought out the Iruligas, a forest dependent tribal community who also did not have any land of their own but temporarily occupied different stretches of land in the nearby forests. Once the Iruligas moved in, the Hakki Pikki began leaving the colony to hunt for a year at a time, sometimes more. The elders who facilitated this exchange still hail it as perfect symbiosis, as one elder reminded me: “the Iruligas are the reason we got to keep our land, and in return, we gave them homes and land of their own. Both communities gained from this agreement.”

Multiple scholars have described the emergence of coalitions across caste groups in the process of claiming land. [Vaidya \(2022\)](#) describes how, in the struggle to claim land rights in rural Uttar Pradesh, cross-caste coalitions emerged that drew together the categories of “Dalit” (the legal category of Scheduled Caste) and “Adivasi” (the legal category of Scheduled Tribe) into one claim-making body. This coalition not only drew together the temporalities of the politics of the two groups, but also their histories and their visions for the future. Similarly, [Benjamin and Raman \(2011\)](#) describe how economically marginalized groups flexibly appropriate ethnic identities to forge inter-caste alliances while claiming land rights in Bangalore. While the Hakki Pikki and Iruliga demonstrate a similar ethic of collaboration, what is unique in their case is the land-sharing arrangement, which was agreed upon and maintained without any documentation or formal contracts attached to it. Hence, the struggle for land rights is altering existing relationships between forest-dependent communities, creating a cooperative ethic between tribal communities that did not previously interact.

However, this seemingly perfect symbiosis was not without its tensions. Most significantly, when the Hakki Pikki returned from hunting, they would demand their homes back, forcing the Iruligas to retreat into makeshift shelters until the Hakki Pikki left for their next hunting expedition. This generated resentment among Iruliga residents, who believed the agreement was unfairly biased in favor of the Hakki Pikki. The tension manifested in different ways; competition for representation in local government, competition for favor among local bureaucrats, and even direct verbal conflict between the two groups. To mitigate this tension, it was agreed that all homes that were subsequently built in the colony would be divided proportionally between the two tribes and the newly burgeoning movement to secure land titles for the community would advocate for titles for both Hakki Pikki and Iruliga families.

In addition to building homes as a way to claim land, both communities quickly realized that bringing land under cultivation was also an effective way of marking ownership of it. Hence, a few families from both communities began cultivating a few acres each and actively encouraged other colony residents to do the same. Manjamma, one of

the earliest Iruligas to arrive in the colony, recalls that her father was one of the first people to advocate for agriculture as a deliberate strategy of marking land ownership: “My father realized that farming the land was the only way to exert our claim over it and prevent the Forest Department officials from reclaiming it. When the department began planting Eucalyptus trees, my father intensified his efforts to ask everyone in the village to take up agriculture. Not everyone listened to him, but he continued trying until the day he died.” The families that did heed his call, however, also began to take on new initiatives to strengthen this strategy. Some families built dams and embankments on the land, signifying that they were not only cultivating the land but also improving it to enable better cultivation. Others took up positions in the tribal committee and used their influence as committee members to persuade other families to take up cultivation.

This strategy of clearing forested land to lay claim to it is one that is employed by other indigenous communities who are contesting state claims to land, both within India and outside. Within land rights movements in the Indian state of Madhya Pradesh, [Ratnam \(2017\)](#) describes how “clearing makes ‘land’ of forests, but also, forests reclaim ‘land’ if left untended or unclaimed.” A similar pattern is visible within movements that are contesting top-down conservation initiatives in Uganda, as [Cavanagh and Benjaminsen \(2015\)](#) demonstrate that rural populations respond not just through overt resistance but also through the illicit cultivation of forested areas, a practice they describe as ‘guerrilla agriculture’. Across several different land rights movements, forest cover is viewed as a marker of state ownership of land, thus eliciting a response of land clearance to mark indigenous claims over the land. This strategy is a clear manifestation of what [Peluso \(2005\)](#) describes as the practice of “local territorialization”.

This strategy also reflects the labor theory of property, which sees ownership as a “reward to useful labor”, indicating that individuals can gain ownership rights over land by applying their labor to it ([Rose, 1994: 13](#)). This principle fosters the belief that “he who works the land, tills it, sweats over it, the land belongs to him” ([Ratnam, 2017: 115](#)). [Levien \(2013\)](#) posits that dispossession of land creates a specific kind of politics, distinct from other forms of peasant politics in its targets, strategy, and tactics. One of the defining features of these struggles is that they are “born with the state as their target” ([Levien, 2013: 360](#)). The strategy of choosing to clear land for cultivation as a means of marking ownership over land is a deliberate choice framed in direct opposition to state strategies of planting trees as a means of claiming land, marking the struggle as one that is articulated with the state as its target.

4.3. Navigating bureaucratic heterogeneity

The primary end goal of the land claiming process is to secure land titles for every household in the colony. Land ownership is not limited to the elderly as even younger families in the colony have been recognized as rightful beneficiaries. Nonetheless, ownership patterns remain gendered, with most land titles issued in the names of male heads of households. This trend, however, is gradually shifting as, with the support of SIEDS, an increasing number of women are being encouraged to claim land in their own names. While the titles that colony residents are fighting for are individual land rights titles, the legal and political work to secure the titles was not done by each of the individual families in the colony. Rather, the entire process of negotiating and securing the land titles was carried out by the committee.

In the 1980s and 90s, the committee was not a formally registered body but an informal coalition of leaders from both tribes. When SIEDS first began working on securing land rights in the 1980s, they worked extensively along with the community leaders in the colony to identify and approach different government officers to further their cause. In 2004, to reduce the committee's dependency on NGO support, SIEDS prompted the committee to register themselves with the state as a formal organization, after which all official communication has been carried out directly with the committee. Presently, the committee makes all

decisions regarding the land issue, with SIEDS providing support when needed in setting up meetings and drafting communications with the state. Membership in the committee is voluntary, but members are usually informally voted in from each tribe when they have showed initiative in organizing for the community.

Most residents of the colony, when asked about the details of the land rights movement, admit to not having too much knowledge about the “day-to-day work” of securing the title deeds, given that “the committee did all the work” of spearheading the movement. This reflects findings by other studies on land-claiming processes in India, which note that often, property claims are articulated as an objective of collective struggle rather than individual claiming processes (Jonnalagadda et al., 2021). In discussing everyday forms of resistance to the state, Sivaramakrishnan (2005) argues that it is often difficult for small farmers to determine “who is responsible for what policy out of a confusing array that impinges on their lives”, and for them to create “a cogent plan of resistance that traces a reliable line between resistive act and ameliorative outcome” (351). Hence, the precise strategy of resistance that is employed depends on knowing where the domination is coming from. This is the role that the committee has taken on within the Hakki Pikki and Iruliga's land rights struggle; to carry out the labor of determining the source of domination, and the specific strategies required to successfully resist.

The process of articulating these strategies of resistance involved committee members negotiating for title deeds with multiple government departments over several decades, largely because the governance of the colony land was split between multiple arms of the state. While the heterogeneity of the bureaucratic apparatus can be a challenge to the land claiming process (Hamilton et al., 2021; Olivier de Sardan and Bierschenk, 2020), colony residents have learnt to strategically leverage this heterogeneity to their benefit, specifically by approaching one department to help move things along with another department.

For instance, in 2015, committee members asked the Tribal Welfare department to help expedite the joint survey and land demarcation process with the Revenue and Forest Departments. Prior to this, colony residents had been requesting for a survey for months, but to no avail. Once the Tribal Welfare department was brought in, a review of internal communications within the government reveals that the scheduling of the survey began almost instantly as Tribal Welfare officials successfully mobilized as well as funded Forest and Revenue officials to schedule and conduct the joint surveys. On 20th July, the Forest Department reached out to the Revenue participate in the survey; on 21st July, the Forest Department issued internal communications with instructions on how to initiate the survey; on 19th August, an officer from the Revenue Department was appointed to supervise the survey; on 4th November the Revenue Department assigned officials to conduct the survey; and on 6th November, the survey was completed. Hence, colony residents were able to draw on both funding and influence from the Tribal Welfare department to prompt the Forest and Revenue departments into action.

Similarly, in March 2017, committee members contacted a local Member of Parliament to push Forest officials into finalizing the transfer of land. In response to their request, in October 2017 the Member of Parliament organized a sit-in protest against the Forest Department with the demand to transfer of land to the Revenue Department, so that it could then be distributed to colony residents. Faced with the pressure of a protest led by an influential politician, in February 2018 the Forest Department finalized the transfer of land to the Revenue Department. In this case, colony residents were able to leverage the fact that they were a valuable vote bank to any elected official to garner the support of their local Member of Parliament, whose political clout was then wielded to push the local bureaucracy into action. Hirsch et al. argue that “contradictory laws, inconsistent state agendas, overlapping allocations, shifting priorities, fuzzy boundaries, poor maps and incomplete data” have a “productive dimension less often observed” (2011: 12), as they allow communities to leverage these differences to argue that their claims are justified. It is this productive dimension that colony residents

are able to leverage in instances where one arm of the state is employed to help surpass roadblocks placed by another arm of the state.

This strategy aims not only to leverage the powers of one department against the hindrances posed by another, but also to leverage the several different strata of officials within each state agency. For instance, in 2016, committee members had three parallel sets of communications within the Forest Department. One set was with the Conservator of Forests, requesting him to coordinate with other departments to transfer the land, because they realized only he was senior enough to command action from officials in other departments. A second set was with the Deputy Conservator of Forests, negotiating the extent of land slotted for transfer to colony residents, because he was senior enough to influence decisions on land transfers but more aware of the land boundaries on the ground than his senior officials were. A third set was with the Divisional Forest Officer, negotiating the names of the exact families who would be beneficiaries of the land once it was transferred, because among the officers who had the authority to approve or reject a claim to the land, only he was close enough to the ground to know the veracity of each family's claim. These separate lines of communication demonstrate that committee members were able to recognize and leverage the strengths of officers at different levels of seniority within the same department.

The decision to appeal to various arms of the state in pursuing the legitimization of their claims suggests a ‘mirroring’ strategy is being deployed by colony residents, whereby communities use state-developed institutions of legibility and subjectification to reclaim territory or control over resource (Vela-Almeida, 2020). By choosing to leverage existing Revenue and Forest codes, colony residents are not rejecting state systems but are strategically drawing on them to bolster their own claims to land. Further, while employing this strategy of ‘mirroring’, colony residents also recognize the institutional pluralism that characterizes the Indian bureaucratic apparatus, where each agency has different goals and responsibilities towards land. Hence, in recognizing that the state they are mirroring is not a monolithic or internally cohesive entity, colony residents are able to deliberately draw on diverging legal regimes within the state apparatus to stake their claims.

Committee members' decades-long efforts of engaging with each of the different government departments involved to secure their rights to the land reveals that “engaging with the law is a costly, tiring, and dispiriting affair” (Lund, 2021: 4). However, legalization continues to be an attractive and sought-after process even for those who do not have the resources to pursue it. This is because the legalization of a land claim secures state backing for the claim, which not only dissolves other competing claims but also shifts the responsibility of protecting and enforcing the right to land from the landholder to the state (Lund, 2021). The formal recognition of land rights, through the issuing of title deeds, establishes the state as “the arbiter of rights and the arbitrator of disputes” (Peluso, 2005: 4). This, in turn, grants authority to the politico-legal institution that is legitimizing the claims to land (Sikor and Lund, 2009). As a result, not only are state institutions recognizing community claims to land, but the community is simultaneously recognizing state institutions as having the authority to legitimize their claims. Hence, the process of claiming land is both a site of everyday state formation and a site for producing new political subjectivities (Lund, 2011; Sikor and Lund, 2009).

4.4. Future strategies of claiming land

The principal goal for solidifying the colony residents' claims to the land is to convert the land from the category of forest land to revenue land. This will not only allow residents to claim full ownership rights over land, but it will also allow them to claim the full range of government schemes, programs, and resources that are available to land-owners. This includes benefits such as irrigation, farm input subsidies, guaranteed wage employment, and subsidies on public infrastructures. However, changing the classification of the land is a long, time-consuming, and resource-intensive process that requires interfacing

with multiple arms of the state at different levels of seniority. The risk of pursuing this strategy is that it might be delayed repeatedly due to bureaucratic hurdles and the difficulty of securing the resources to pursue it, due to which the entire process of changing the status of the land is likely to take a decade or more to be completed.

As a stopgap measure, the short-term strategy that has been identified is to claim rights under the Forest Rights Act (FRA), which is an act that recognizes the rights of forest dwelling communities to use and govern forest land and resources. There are three types of rights the FRA recognizes: Individual Forest Rights (IFR), which allows individual households to claim land titles for forest land if they have been cultivating or residing in it since prior to December 2005; Community Rights (CR), which allows residents of a village to harvest forest resources from forest areas that fall within another village's boundary; and Community Forest Resource Rights (CFRR), allows a village to claim the right to use and manage forest areas that fall within the customary boundary of the village. Under the clauses of IFR and CFRR, colony residents will be able to claim individual rights of ownership over their houses and communal ownership of the common areas in the village, such as the central gathering space, the school and health center, and commons land.

However, the rights provided under the FRA, while being heritable, are not alienable or transferable. Additionally, they do not secure the access to public infrastructure that is available for revenue lands. Hence, the main challenge of this strategy is that it will serve only as a short-term measure that provides a limited set of rights until the land can be converted to revenue status. Sikor and Lund (2009) argue that what might be considered a legitimate claim is historically contingent, where the ideal moment for proposing a particular claim depends entirely on the "political constellation of institutions that can recognize claims as valid" (7). The strategic choice of pursuing different venues towards legitimization in the short versus the long run demonstrates colony residents' recognition of this historical contingency and active efforts to identify the right political institutions at the right time.

The parallel pursuit of these two strategies for solidifying land claims is also evidence of colony residents being able to leverage different arms of the state to fulfill different components of a single agenda. Through the FRA, the colony residents are claiming the totality of rights that is available to them under the Forest Department's jurisdiction. Simultaneously, by seeking conversion to revenue status, they are leveraging the support of the Revenue Department as a way to counter the challenges posed by the Forest Department. Ratnam (2017) describes how the fuzziness of the boundaries of official categories such as 'forest land' and 'revenue land' feed into villagers' own understandings and subversions of these categories. Having discovered that the boundaries between the jurisdictions of the two departments are uncertain, colony residents are deliberately leveraging the 'fuzziness' in the distinction between the mandates of the two departments to advocate for a re-classification of land that would benefit them the most.

In institutionally pluralist contexts, there exist not only competing claims to land but also a multiplicity of institutions that are competing to validate these claims, leading to the emergence of competing legitimacies (Lund, 2021; Sikor and Lund, 2009). In such landscapes, no single actor or institution has the authority to validate and legalize claims to land. In setting such as this, where politico-legal institutions have overlapping authorities and jurisdictions, social actors might reference their claims to multiple different politico-legal institutions (Sikor and Lund, 2009). The FRA and the Revenue Code offer two different regimes, and the colony residents have been able to discern the complementarity of the two regimes and appeal to both simultaneously.

The diverse range of land-claiming strategies discussed above demonstrate that two key processes are forming the lynchpin of the land rights movement. On the one hand, colony residents are employing a 'mirroring' strategy to articulate their claims to the land, whereby they are using state-created mechanisms and legal frameworks to demonstrate the validity of their claims against the state. Recognizing the heterogeneity of the state apparatus, as part of this strategy of mirroring,

they are deliberately appealing to different legal regimes to gain from the opportunities presented by each. In the existing system of institutional pluralism, the diverging roles and mandates of each arm of the state presents an opportunity for colony residents to stake their claims in response to each department's differing mandate. On the other hand, success in claiming land has also depended on the emergence of a cooperative ethic between different Adivasi groups. This alliance is premised on a unique land and resource sharing strategy that was honored for decades, and continues to be, without any written agreements to regulate it. Both processes, namely the 'mirroring' of heterogeneous state apparatus via appeals to distinctly different legal regimes as well as the reconfiguring of inter-tribal relations via novel land sharing arrangements, are playing a central role in claiming land.

4.5. Maps

In translating the material claims to land discussed in section 4.2 to legal-cartographic claims to land, maps and lists have emerged as two key artefacts that enable this transition. Maps have historically been deployed by state powers as tools to control, administer, and make legible populations (Rye and Kurniawan, 2017), and while this is often rightfully perceived as an imposition of power that needs to be resisted, in this case the colony residents require themselves to be legible to the state in order to access the rights and resources they are seeking. In their quest for formalizing land tenure, mapping by the state helps "render technical" (Bryan, 2011: 40) the legal recognition of their land rights.

In addition to requiring maps to make their land rights legible to the state, colony residents also require maps to understand their own rights for themselves. Since the movement began, colony residents have remained unaware of the location of their own boundaries, largely because there has been no agreement between the Forest and Revenue departments about the boundaries between their jurisdictions. In order to establish one set of boundaries, the colony residents have requested joint surveys between the two departments multiple times. The primary aim of the joint survey is to generate and formalize a single set of boundaries that is agreed upon by both the Forest and the Revenue department. The survey is conducted by field officials from both departments who, together with colony residents, walk the course of the colony boundary along with a handheld GPS device. The GPS coordinates that are generated during this exercise are compiled into a map, which is then entered into the records of both departments.

The first joint survey between the Forest and Revenue department was requested in 1995 by SIEDS as a means to resolve the uncertainties in boundaries between the two departments. However, as the survey was unsuccessful in resolving the irregularities, between 2002 and 2015, six more official surveys were conducted, with each survey attempting to remedy uncertainties and errors from the previous. Each survey that was conducted required multiple rounds of communication and coordination to facilitate the process. For instance, the 2015 survey was initiated in January, and was followed by multiple sets of letters from the committee to the Revenue, Forest, and Tribal Welfare departments, as well as letters between and within these departments. Further, colony residents share that for each round of surveying that occurred, they had to make multiple calls, meet multiple government officers, and visit multiple departments just to schedule a single surveying operation or to receive clarifications about their own land boundaries.

These seven official mapping exercises, the several community-led mapping exercises preceding each one, and the immense labor associated with each are highly revelatory. On the one hand, it demonstrates that overlapping jurisdictions are not always advantageous. In some instances, such as when it comes to the use of mapping as a tool to formalize land claims, the 'fuzziness' of boundaries becomes a hindrance to their efforts. However, at the same time, the fact that colony residents were able to repeatedly contest each official map and initiate the production of another one also demonstrates that there exist opportunities to modify state boundaries to address community concerns.

Despite the process being labor intensive, it is pursued because of the value of state recognition, and colony residents' recognition of the state as a legitimizing authority once again demonstrates the land claiming process as a site of state formation (Lund, 2011; Peluso, 2005). Crucially, each iteration of the mapping exercise creates a space for all actors involved, both state and non-state, to contest existing boundaries and modify it to further their own goals. Hence, each re-initiation of the map-making exercise reflects the shortcomings of the preceding iteration. However, at the same time, these repetitions are not merely signs of failure but deliberate and strategic interventions, undertaken to revise earlier maps in ways that more closely align with the re-initiators' interpretations of what constitute legitimate boundaries.

Despite multiple surveys being conducted till date, the boundaries remain unclear and the maps inaccessible to the colony residents. In the face of mounting frustration at being denied access to their own maps, I offered to map the boundaries of the colony and the 350 acres of agricultural land using my own GPS device (see Fig. 2). Wood (2006) describes how during the civil war in El Salvador, many *campesinos* participated with enthusiasm in map-making despite it being a time-consuming activity, driven by the motivation of recounting their history. Similarly, in the Hakki Pikki colony, walking the boundaries of the land was an exercise that took all day and required colony residents to navigate steep slopes, muddy trails, and thickets of forests. Yet even the elderly were eager to participate, as they saw it as a means of contesting state claims and marking their communities' ownership of the land.

The end goal of this mapping exercise was to create a map that can be used by colony residents to claim land rights through the legal system; particularly laws that require cartographic proof to accompany claims to rights. The act of securing land rights for marginalized groups through mapping and the legal registration of land rights has been recognized in scholarship as 'countermapping' (Benjaminsen and Sjaastad, 2008; Anthias, 2019). This is an important component of staging indigenous claims against the state because it translates everyday protest and resistance to cartographic-legal language that is legible to the state (Rye and Kurniawan, 2017). In this vein, the "countermap" we produced "gain(s) legitimacy by using the language of landed property rights

(territorial claims)" and using a "textual form", namely a map, that is understood by the state apparatus (Peluso, 2005: 3). However, as many scholars note, the endpoint of such projects remains to be "legal-cartographic recognition by the state" (Anthias, 2019). This forces the community to conform to the frameworks and practices of property ownership prevalent in the socio-political sphere in which those rights are exercised and guaranteed (Bryan, 2011). Hence, while the map we created acts as a resource for communities to buttress their legal strategies to claim land rights, it also forces them to conform to the existing legal frameworks imposed by the state.

The seven official prior mapping exercises, my own mapping exercise with colony residents, and the immense amount of labor necessary for each one is further evidence of a 'mirroring' strategy being pursued despite it being a laborious and tiresome affair, because of the value attached to having state backing for land claims. The end-goal of the labor is not to generate alternative maps but to modify the existing government maps to reflect colony residents' claims over the land. In other words, the goal is not to reject state systems or propose alternatives to state systems, but rather to leverage state systems to legitimize their claims to the land.

4.6. Lists

The residents of the colony first began to prepare a list of eligible beneficiaries to the land in 1989. The exercise was carried out in response to the request of a government officer at the time, who said that if he is to hand out land titles, he needs to have a list of names. In order to create a list for this officer, the entire community sat down to determine who the original residents of the colony were, and which families have a rightful claim to the land. However, the process soon escalated into a heated argument on who came first to the colony and who had the greatest rights to the land. The contestations regarding whose claim to land holds more validity based on the arrival of their ancestors into the colony exemplifies the use of 'first-comer' narratives to solidify claims to land. In any struggle for land rights, the politics of articulating who belongs to a piece of land involves "struggles over whom to count among the first-comers and how to define the relevant property-holding

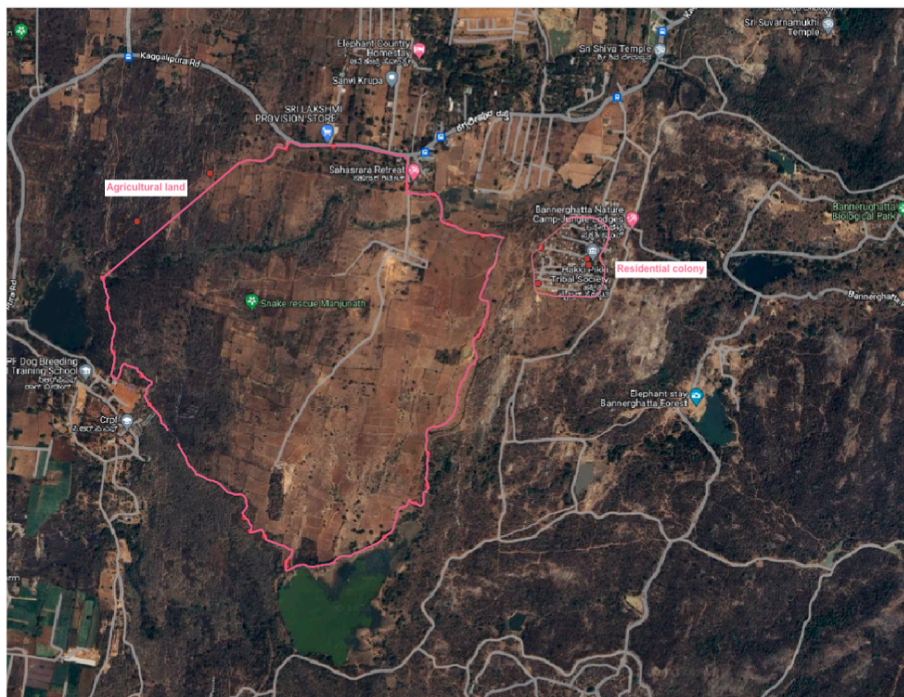


Fig. 2. Results of the community-led mapping exercise.

community” (Lentz, 2013: x). Lentz (2013) argue that such first-comer narratives act as an “oral land registry” which legitimize the origin of one’s property rights by creating a link between the rights historically established by the first possessors and the rights currently being sought by their descendants. In asserting their individual claims over land, each household drew on the “moral right of residence” (Moore, 2014: 128) that they possessed by virtue of the role their respective ancestors had played in the establishment of the colony.

In the years following this first attempt to create a comprehensive list, multiple attempts at drawing up ‘the list’ took place, with each iteration marked by its own set of conflicts. Each iteration of the list-making exercise has been initiated in response to government requests for an official record of beneficiaries. The process begins with colony residents, who, through multiple rounds of meetings and discussions, collectively compile a list of individuals they consider rightful claimants to land. This community-generated list is then submitted to the Forest, Revenue, and Tribal Welfare departments, which review and evaluate the names internally before releasing an “official” list of beneficiaries they deem eligible.

Committee members have attempted to make each iteration of the list-making as democratic as possible by involving all residents of the colony in the decision-making process. For each family in the colony, the decision regarding inclusion in the final list of beneficiaries was determined through a majority vote involving not only committee members but all colony residents. Eligibility was assessed primarily on the basis of each household’s relationship to the original migrants who had first settled in the colony. While most decisions were reached without dispute, some rejected claimants have openly voiced their dissent, either leading to further negotiation or an increase in tensions within the community. These tensions stem primarily from the scarcity of land relative to a population that has expanded significantly since the 1960s, when the land was initially allotted to a small number of families. Population growth has intensified competition over land claims, generating internal contestation within the community. In this process, previously less salient distinctions, particularly between early settlers and later arrivals, have become increasingly consequential, as first-comer families assert stronger claims to land based on the timing of their settlement.

Trudeau (2006) describes the politics of belonging as entailing the discourses and practices that create and maintain both discursive and material boundaries of a polity and the spaces that correspond to this polity. The debates among colony residents regarding who is eligible for a title exemplify these politics, as it consisted of multiple rounds of discursive negotiations to delineate which households ‘belong’ to the colony. Debates around who are the rightful claimants of the land create “open moments of selective inclusion”, where colony residents construct “narratives of legitimation” (Elamin, 2018: 69) to justify why their claims are valid and others’ are not.

The final list that is submitted to the government may not be agreed upon by all, but the list and the rationale behind each inclusion and exclusion is known to all in the colony. Once the community has drawn up a list among themselves, they submit it to the government to verify. Officials from the Forest, Revenue, and Tribal Welfare departments are brought in to evaluate the list that is submitted by the committee. Neither the internal decision-making within each department nor the communications between departments regarding their assessment of the veracity of each proposed beneficiary on the list is not made public or shared with colony residents. However, once all three departments have assessed the list, they release an amended list with the beneficiaries they believe have a rightful claim to the land. Hence, the mechanics of the government verification process remain opaque to both the colony residents and civil society organizations. This list-making process, which is initiated by the community and then passed along for government approval, demonstrates that visibility in a community is central to staking one’s claim to land. At the first stage, one’s visibility in the community needs to be declared and acknowledged within the

community, and at the next stage, the same visibility needs to be verified by the state. As bottom-up nature of this process demonstrates, the list is not just a tool for the government to regulate the community, but also a tool for the community to regulate itself.

In the last two decades, four official lists of beneficiaries have been drawn up. Just like the multiple iterations of map-making, each list attempted to remedy grievances that arose with the previous list. Each list has been contested by colony residents, because each one has excluded families who are believed to be rightful claimants of the land. Multiple scholars have argued that exclusion is a necessary feature of every land tenure agreement, where defining one party’s rights to land tenure entails excluding another party from its use (Hirsch et al., 2011; Elamin, 2018). They describe this phenomenon as ‘exclusion’s double edge’, where exclusivity in land rights brings not just the desired positive effects but also a number of unintended consequences. For instance, in the case of claiming land rights, “each villager’s assertion of a right to exclude runs up against another villager’s claim for access” (Hirsch et al., 2011: 146). In the inevitable case where contradictory claims confront each other, the approval of one claim then entails exclusion of the other.

Like with the map, colony residents’ adherence to the list, a document and a format recognized and preferred by the state, demonstrates their reliance on mirroring strategies. Further, just as the multiple iterations of the mapping exercise provide space for both state and non-state actors to contest existing boundaries and propose modification that benefit their own interests, the multiple iterations of list-making exercises also serve a similar function. In the case of lists, it provides space for both rightful and illegal claimants to contest existing land distributions and propose modified ones. Additionally, the bottom-up process of list-making also demonstrates that in addition to the multiple strategies of claim-making discussed above, visibility in a community is also equally necessary to stake one’s claim to land.

5. Conclusion

In conclusion, an examination of the strategies used by both groups to claim land reveals that daily practices of marking ownership among the colony residents are articulated in direct opposition to state strategies of claiming land. However, colony residents are not rejecting the state apparatus but rather are employing ‘mirroring’ strategies to articulate their claims to the land, whereby they are using state-created legal frameworks and systems to demonstrate the validity of their claims against the state. These mirror strategies deliberately appeal to different legal regimes to leverage the heterogeneity in the state apparatus that governs land. Hence, the lack of internal cohesion within the state is successfully leveraged by colony residents to further their claims to land. Simultaneously, the land claiming process has also reconfigured relationships between forest-dependent communities in the region, leading to the emergence of a cooperative ethic between the Hakki Pikki and the Iruligas. Both processes, namely the ‘mirroring’ of heterogeneous state apparatus via appeals to distinctly different legal regimes as well as the reconfiguring of inter-tribal relations via novel land sharing arrangements, are critical to ensuring success in land-claiming.

Within these land-claiming processes, maps and lists emerge as key artefacts that further the ‘mirror’ strategy employed by colony residents. The end-goal of both processes is not to generate alternative systems of designating land ownership, but to use documents and formats that are recognized by the state and modify them to reflect colony residents’ claims over the land. The multiple iterations of both mapping and list-making exercises creates space for multiple actors, both state and non-state, to contest existing land ownership patterns and propose modification that benefit their own interests. Finally, the process of creating lists, of who is eligible to claim rights and who is not, produces first-comer narratives that invoke both material and moral claims to land, and the resulting politics of inclusion within the list-making process demonstrates that visibility in a community is necessary to stake one’s claim to land.

The experience of the Hakki Pikki Colony demonstrates that in the face of systems of institutional pluralism, within which different arms of the state marshal competing idioms and practices to further their own goals, communities are able to recognize and appeal to the strengths of different legal regimes. Further, it calls for an expansion of the current understandings of the practices of territorialization in claiming land. As the strategies employed by colony residents demonstrate, territorialization includes but is not limited to material markings on the land, such as the planting or clearing of trees, and also extends to include claims to land via creative land sharing strategies that emerge from novel alliances between tribal groups. Additionally, by documenting the successes and challenges of the Hakki Pikki and Iruliga communities' struggles for land rights, this study offers insights that may serve as a resource for other indigenous and forest-dwelling groups engaged in efforts to secure rights to land and natural resources.

Beyond its theoretical contributions, this study offers several policy-relevant insights for aligning bureaucratic structures with the socio-economic realities of forest-dwelling communities. First, the experiences of the Hakki Pikki Colony suggest a need to expand the scope of the FRA to provide for semi-nomadic communities by accounting for non-sedentary land-use patterns and non-continuous occupation of land. Further, communities engaged in similar struggles to formalize land rights would benefit from the mechanics of the government verification process being less opaque, as the current lack of transparency in inter-departmental deliberations often alienates communities from the administrative black box that determines their legal eligibility for land. Finally, informed by the bottom-up nature of claim-making that the FRA mandates, the regularization of revenue land would also benefit from including bottom-up participation, such as formally incorporating community-led mapping processes to clarify land boundaries and translate local spatial practices into a cartographic language recognized by the state.

Declaration of competing interest

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

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Data availability

No data was used for the research described in the article.

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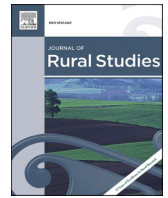
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Corrigendum

Corrigendum to ‘Claiming land in heterogenous bureaucracies: The daily labor and decadal cycles of land rights movements in Karnataka, India’ [J. Rural Stud. 122, February 2026, 104003]

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The authors regret that following errors were identified after the published paper appear online

In the introduction, the citations for the following sentence have not appeared correctly: “Scholars and practitioners have widely noted that the land rights of tribal communities across India are frequently undermined by the absence of formal land ownership documentation (cite; cite).”

This sentence should be correctly cited as: “Scholars and practitioners have widely noted that the land rights of tribal communities across India are frequently undermined by the absence of formal land

ownership documentation (Behera and Singh, 2014; Ali Faraz et al., 2016)”

The bibliography for these citations are below:

Behera, Hari Charan, and A. P. Singh. 2014. “Land Reforms and Record Management in Tribal Areas.” In *Resources, Tribes and Development*. Rawat Publications.

Ali Faraz, Mohd., Rajanya Bose, and Sandeep Ghusale. 2016. *The Extent and Nature of Individual Tribal Land Alienation in Fifth Schedule States in India*. Centre for Equity Studies.

The authors would like to apologise for any inconvenience caused.

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