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Counter-Hegemonic Collective Action and the Politics of Civil Society: The Case of a Social Movement in Kerala, India, in the Context of Neoliberal Globalization

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SOCIETY: THE CASE OF A SOCIAL MOVEMENT IN KERALA, INDIA, IN THE
CONTEXT OF NEOLIBERAL GLOBALIZATION

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<u>Counter-hegemonic Collective Action and the Politics of</u>
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Social movements in various parts of the world have been attempting to challenge the forces of neoliberal globalization and the social problems caused by this economic trend. Many such movements have been advancing the idea of global civil society in order to counter 'globalization from above'. Despite the efforts of these movements to democratize social relations, the domination of these powerful forces persist and result in further oppression of marginalized people. This study attempts to discover the reasons why these social movements and civil society, despite popular support, fail to challenge effectively the power of such social forces. In particular, this study analyzes, through in-depth interviews with activists, and archival and observational data, the world-view of civil society activists in a movement against Coca-Cola initiated by the marginalized people in Kerala, India. While this struggle, popularly called the 'Plachimada movement', managed to effect the temporary closure of a Coca-Cola plant, whose operation reportedly affected the ground water in the region, the local people felt that it failed to address their conditions of marginality. The analysis of the movement's processes finds that hegemony, or indirect forms of domination, often stands in the way of such efforts at democratic social change. The study concludes with suggestions for

rethinking civil society as an arena of reflexive collective action that is counter-hegemonic.

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Chapter 1

Introduction

A cliché of contemporary times is that we live in a globalized world. Apologists – the globalists – define globalization in terms of increased rates of "flows" and "exchanges" of human beings, goods, and money across national borders that are thought to be increasingly losing relevance in a world that is tightly "networked."

The globalists point out that there has been a qualitative and quantitative change in the nature of social relations from the early part of the post Second World War era to the 1990s, which is characterized as the Age of Globalization. They present startling statistics to support the validity of their claims: such as the levels of international trade increasing from a mere $629 billion in 1960 to $7,430 billion in 2001; increase of Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) all over the world from $66 billion in 1960 to $7,100 billion in 2002; the growth in the number of international companies from 7,000 in late 1960s to 65,000 in 2001; and a similar growth in the number of international civil society organizations from 1,117 in 1956 to over 20,000 in 2000.[1]

While these above figures are astounding in themselves, those related to the "marquee" sphere of contemporary globalization, finance capital – including foreign exchange, banking, securities markets, derivative businesses and the insurance industry[2] – are even more startling: that is, more is traded in six hours of the foreign exchange market than the world bank has ever lent in its entire history.[3] As part of financial

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[1] Jan Aart Scholte, <u>Globalization: A Critical Introduction</u>, (New York: Palgrave, 2000).

[2] <u>Ibid.</u>

[3] J.D. Clark, "Ethical Globalization: the Dilemmas and Challenges of Internationalizing Civil Society" in Michael Edwards, John Gaventa (Eds.), <u>Global Civil Action</u>. (Bouldier, Colorad: Rienner, 2001).

globalization, transactions of multiple trillions of dollars occur everyday, many of them across borders. Accordingly, Anthony Giddens has characterized the world today as the "the runaway world."[4]

Summoning this body of evidence, theorists of globalization argue that social existences and lived experiences are unfettered by limits imposed by space. The current social world is said to be characterized by space-time compression, which allows people to think of the planet earth as one huge arena of human action.[5] Accordingly, scholars have advanced the idea that globalization works in scalar ways – i.e., through interaction among multiple scales, such as the local, regional, national, and global.

A crucial import of these assertions has been manifest in the debates about the changes happening to politics and the traditional sphere of politics – the nation-state. The primacy of the state in the Westphalian system has been based on the principle of territoriality. People living within the territorial limits of a place, having established common customs and social practices, were thought to constitute a nation. Furthermore, the "modern" liberal democratic state presided over the nation. According to Ulrich Beck, this condition that characterized what he refers to as the first phase of modernity is under attack in the context of globalization.[6] The idea of "statism", in other words, has also become obsolete. With global flows and exchanges making borders porous, the state as the sole authority of governance is being challenged in the "second modernity." Globalization as the "second modernity", Beck says, overturns the "idea that *we live and*

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[4] Anthony Giddens, <u>Runaway World: How Globalization is Reshaping our Lives,</u> (New York: Routledge, 2000).

[5] Scholte, <u>Globalization</u>, p. 46-61

[6] Ulrich Beck, <u>What is Globalization?</u> (Trans. by Patrick Camiller) Cambridge, (UK: Polity Press, 2000).

act in the self-enclosed spaces of national States and their respective national societies."[7]
Thus, practices based on the old paradigms need to be rethought to meet the challenges posed by globalization.

As a result, ideas such as the "reconstructed state" are advanced, since governance happens at multiple levels in a world characterized by "transplanetary social relations."[8] In other words, governance is thought to be "polycentric." Among the many ideas advanced in the sphere of public governance are "private governance" and the increased role of (global) civil society. In accordance with these ideas, with the rise of the discourse of globalization, civil society has come to be seen as a major player in conducting social and political life on a planetary scale.[9] The supporters of globalization propose that civil society has the potential to ameliorate the condition of the people who have to face the ill effects of globalization. On the other hand, many of those who oppose globalization look to civil society as an arena of struggle against existing hegemonic forces.

Clearly discernible in the popular renditions of globalization is the emphasis on the novelty of the world as "globalized." Yet opponents of globalization argue that change, if any, is limited to certain sections, and that not much has changed for large swathes of humanity. While the "change versus continuity" debates in globalization tend to focus more on the formal dimensions of change, or the lack thereof, what is required is a concrete analysis of the actual content of social change in the context of globalization. Clearly, globalization, deployed as a catchall phrase designated to refer to macro-structural processes and the social change therein, often obscures as much as it reveals

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[7] Ibid., p.20, (italics original).

[8] Scholte, Globalization, p. 46-61; p. 132-158

[9] Ibid.

about the human condition. Contrary to these trends, perhaps change should be studied more concretely. Such an effort may help demonstrate the continuities and specific aspects of change brought about by globalization. In other words, what is required is a close look at how globalization is experienced by people.

This study seeks to understand the nature of social conflict in the context of globalization in India. In India, like in many other parts of the "Third World," processes of globalization have been manifested in the form of economic liberalization and structural adjustments, all under the rather ambiguous phrase of "reforms" that emphasizes economic "growth." While the actual structural adjustment policies were promulgated in early 1990s, trends towards such developments were visible throughout the 1980s. These changes, informed by the ideological content of neoliberalism, should be understood against the preexisting and continuing social processes in India.

For example, Colonialism was characterized by the infusion of external capital into Indian societies, whereby captive markets and the appropriation of social and material surplus was made possible by the ossification of feudal structures. These processes of imperialism, a particular form of capitalism, encompassed all aspects of social life, including the political, economic, and cultural. And the formal end of colonialism saw the emergence of the local elite in the political leadership of the country. India was thus set on a path of state sponsored capitalist development which, primarily due to the crisis of legitimization that the elite classes faced time and again, was presented to the people as "social development," or the state's commitment to improving their lot. However, with the onset of neoliberal globalization, such commitments have

been sidelined by the new era of the market, with "growth" expected to be facilitated at any cost.

While India has managed to maintain high growth rates of about eight percent annually, globalization has not translated into better quality of life for the "masses." On the other hand, if anything, more and more communities are facing threats to their survival, with land and other important resources taken away from them. Accumulation by dispossession is on the rise with natural resources, including water, being turned over to private ownership.[10] A recent statistic showed that 40 percent of India's huge rural population is landless.[11] With higher rates of accumulation, social inequalities are on the rise, as the poor are mired in acute poverty. Clearly, while there are qualitative differences between the era of neoliberalism and the earlier experiences of colonialism and developmentalism, a crucial aspect of continuity is that the majority of people continue to be excluded from the key institutions of social life. In other words, the processes of neoliberal globalization in India, like the earlier ones, are characterized by the continuation of hegemonic structures of domination.

The Problem of this Study and Research Questions

Plachimada is an agrarian village situated in the eastern part of southwestern state of Kerala in India. Within the past decade, the ruling leftist parties in Kerala made the decision, as part of the neoliberal program of inviting foreign direct investment to accelerate economic growth, to invite Coca Cola to establish a manufacturing unit in

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[10] Vandana Shiva, Globalization's New Wars: Seed, Water & Life Forms, (New Delhi: Women Unlimited, 2005).

[11] Vikas Rawal, "Ownership Holdings of Land in Rural India: Putting the Record Straight" in Economic and Political Weekly, (43:10 March 8-14, 2008).

Kerala. Hindustan Coca Cola Beverages Private Limited (HCCB), the Indian subsidiary of Coca Cola, established a plant in Plachimada that started operations in March, 2000.

A few months after the plant started operation, the local people living around the plant started to experience a shortage of ground water that they relied on traditionally for everyday consumption. Aside from the depletion of the ground water, they also experienced physical ailments that were thought to be caused by pollution of the ground water. Besides these immediate experiences, the local people, mostly belonging to tribal groups and "lower" castes, had been experiencing intense marginalization and oppression as part of feudalized forms of everyday social life in Plachimada and the nearby areas. In response to the problems they faced – the experience of intense marginalization and oppression, along with the immediate threat to their existence as a community from the Coca Cola plant – the local people initiated a struggle led initially by the "Anti-Coca Cola Struggle Committee". While the activists initially were the local people, a broader movement began to develop.

The initial phase of the movement was characterized by high levels of state repression imposed on the struggling activists, low levels of resources, and lack of visibility in the public sphere, primarily due to indifference to the movement by the media in Kerala. However, as the movement advanced, the civil society activists in Kerala became involved. Many civil society organizations, including voluntary associations of various sorts, such as NGOs, environmentalists, developmentalists, religious organizations, youth groups, students' organizations, and some political parties, extended their support to the movement. The Plachimada struggle soon attracted worldwide attention as a social movement of communities of oppressed castes and tribal

groups against a multinational giant. After protracted protests, the plant in Plachimada was closed by an executive intervention of the Government of Kerala. In fact, a legal suit is currently on-going in the Supreme Court of India with regard to the closure of the plant.

Civil society activists, who emerged in leadership positions as the movement advanced, had a decisive influence on the Plachimada movement. The civil society leadership, in interacting with the agencies of the state and political parties, took the movement in particular directions at crucial junctures, such as defining its policy and style of protest. Hence the movement alternated between an ambitious program that sought to counter hegemony and proposing limited goals of securing the closure of the plant.

In the context of such neoliberal globalization, civil society became either a sphere of emancipation or a factor that ameliorates the ill effects of this process. Indeed, there is a body of literature that points to this ambiguity about the raison d'etre of civil society.[12] Accordingly there is a need to rethink civil society. However, before attempting to rethink civil society, insight must be gained into the specific ways in which civil society organizations and leaders operate on the ground. As a point of departure, Sanjay Kumar points out: "Given the fact that societies with liberal polity have been and continue to be unequal in many aspects, what is needed is an exploration of the mechanisms that integrate liberal State and Civil Society to existing social inequalities, irrespective of formal egalitarianism."[13]

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[12] Petras, The New Development Politics.

[13] Sanjay Kumar, "Civil Society in Society", Economic and Political Weekly (29 July, 2000)

Therefore, the thrust of this study is to understand the role of civil society in the social movement in Plachimada. The primary research question was: what was the world-view or ideology adopted by the civil society activists in Plachimada movement? A world-view or ideology adopted by individuals informs their actions, gives them meaning, and defines their limits. In the liberal tradition, civil society is seen as a "sub" sphere in relation to the state, which is the source of social order. As part of the realism that attaches primacy to maintaining the integrity of the state, actions of the individuals that constitute civil society are expected to follow this imperative. Citizens often internalize these realist assumptions that go into the making of social order and reproduce them as "common sense."[14]

Lately, however, (global) civil society has been proposed as an alternative that can transcend the limitations imposed by the prevailing social order.[15] The implication of such a view of civil society is its reconstitution as a theater of collective action where challenges to established power relations can be launched. The two renditions of civil society mentioned above are rooted in contrasting world-views. In practice, the world view adopted − whether realist or radical − can fundamentally shape the actions of civil society activists: while the realist world-view reproduces the *status quo* of power relations in society, radical action can be counter-hegemonic. While the radical view has gained ascendancy in the recent literature, there is a need to understand whether such theoretical positions correspond to the actual experiences of civil society activists.

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[14] Antonio Gramsci, Selections from the Prison Notebooks of Antonio Gramsci. (Ed. and translated by Quintin Hoare and Geoffrey Nowell Smith), (New York: International Publishers, 1971).

[15] John Keane, Global Civil Society? (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2003).

Therefore, this study analyses the processes that constituted the Plachimada movement in order to understand the role of civil society and the world-view adopted by the activists.

Contribution of Research

There are clearly two dominant theoretical views emerging in the recent literature on civil society. One view identifies civil society as the theater of collective action that seeks to counter the hegemony of neoliberal globalization and its many ill effects. According to this view, the transplanetary spread of social relations as part of globalization has made possible global civil society, which can contribute to reshaping globalization, or "globalization from below." However, such a maneuver in civil society requires advancing a radical critique of the *status quo* – in the theory and practice – that often becomes the basis for a counter-hegemonic collective action.

The second view is suspicious of the recent celebration of civil society in the context of neoliberalism. According to this view, civil society, in its present incarnation, is incapable of countering the hegemonic social relations whereby marginalization and oppression of people continue to be produced. This view holds that the rise of civil society is part of the neoliberal program.

While both of these views of civil society present theoretical propositions, there is a need to understand civil society in actual experience – its concrete practices – in order to determine whether it is a theater of counter-hegemonic collective action or a sphere where domination is reproduced. This study analyzes the concrete actions of civil society actors with respect to their protests and the accompanying social change. Through such analysis, the world-view informing the actions of civil society can be unraveled. Drawing

on the actual experiences of civil society in action, this research is expected to contribute to a better understanding of the possibilities or limitations of civil society in the so-called Era of Globalization.

Chapter Divisions

The second chapter will attempt to develop a theoretical framework to guide the analysis of the role of civil society with reference to hegemony in Plachimada movement. Initially, the various theories of social movements, such as resource mobilization, political process model, and theories of new social movements will be critically analyzed. The aim is to develop a framework for studying social movements. At the end of this chapter, important questions related to hegemony and civil society will be addressed.

The third chapter identifies the hegemonic structures in Indian societies by considering their historical development and consolidation. Specifically, the experience of colonialism, post-colonial developmentalism, and the more recent neoliberal turn that linked India to processes of globalization will be discussed. In concrete terms, the point is to unravel the hegemonic social order that informs social relations: understood as partly feudal, yet infused with the logic of capital and historically subjected to imperialist forms of control. In the latter part of this chapter, the trend popularly known as the "Kerala Model of Development" will be critically assessed.

The Plachimada movement will be described in detail in Chapter Four. The chapter begins with a description of the socio-spatial and demographic characteristics of Plachimada, followed by the events that lead up to the establishment of the HCCB manufacturing plant. In the later sections, the emergence of the social movement and the

concrete collective action undertaken will be described with a view to identifying the actions and practices initiated by the different actors/agents.

In the following chapter, Chapter Five, the methodology employed in this study will be outlined. Initially, some of the methodological debates that have characterized the development of sociology as a discipline of study will be considered. Accordingly, the theoretical justifications for employing qualitative methods will be presented, in addition to a discussion of the logic of abduction that informs this research. Finally, the research design will be discussed with reference to initial preparation, data gathering, and analysis.

In Chapter Six, the data are analyzed. The analysis is organized through four themes related to the social movement in Plachimada. The focus of the analysis is to understand the world-view that informed the practices of civil society as part of Plachimada movement.

This analysis will be followed by a chapter where these findings are discussed. In this chapter, Chapter Seven, these findings are discussed in the light of the existing literature on civil society, hegemony, and social movements as counter-hegemonic collective action. Based on the findings of the study, some theoretical directions with regard to rethinking civil society will be explored.

In sum, this study attempts to understand the nature of the social conflict emerging in the context of globalization, and, more specifically, the people's responses to these conflicts. The crucial question is: what should be the nature of civil society, if this social domain is going to address the marginalization and oppression of people. Hopefully some insight can be gained into the operation of civil society by this research.

Accordingly, the debate over the function of civil society in the process of globalization might be moved forward.

Chapter 2

Social Movements and Civil Society: Towards a Theoretical Framework of Anti-Hegemonic Collective Action

There has been widespread consensus among sociologists that social movements are connected to social change. Demand for social change is the expression of the collective agency of people who have been oppressed or excluded within a society and the related social relations. Therefore, action/agency is a central concept for understanding the nature of a social movement. More often than not, such action is understood as undertaken by "rational" beings, whose rationality is manifest in the internalization of institutional norms.[16] On the contrary, recent theorists such as Bourdieu have proposed a more concrete theory of action that does not seek to limit the creative potential of human agents.[17] As Bourdieu points out, action is not merely institutionally mandated; instead, collective action has the ability to transform institutionalized norms.

However, with the functionalist bias of early sociology, social change was characterized in "systemic" terms, often presenting a rather limited notion of action/agency.[18] This view understands the social system as capable of evolving by itself, with the result that its elements adjust to any changes quickly so that a society can continue to work effectively. As a result, in early social movement literature, social change is an exogenous variable, and movements are thought of as manifestations of

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[16] James S. Coleman, Rational Choice Theory: Advocacy and Critique, (Newbury Park, Calif.: Sage Publications, 1992).

[17] Pierre Bourdieu, Practical reason: On the theory of action, (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 1998).

[18] Talcott Parsons, The structure of social action: a study in social theory with special reference to a group of recent European Writers. (New York: Free Press 1968).

collective behavior by people who could not cope with change. Social change is understood here in a way similar to the schema of institutional evolution suggested by Parsons.[19] No doubt, the more recent theories of social movements have attempted to incorporate a more sophisticated version of social change. However, there is a need to further clarify the dimensions of social change with respect to a concrete theory of social action, given its importance for analyzing social movements.

In sociology, often the "social" is taken as given, thereby leading to renditions of society without particular historical specificities. Such a view makes it possible to discuss social structure without any reference to the concrete power relations that structure a society. Thus, it becomes possible to think of society as an effectively functioning organism, so long as its constituent parts know their roles and perform them effectively. Such reified and ahistorical views of society are unhelpful in understanding the nature of social movements that often emerge within a field of power relations. The effort here, then, will be to analyze the processes whereby concrete social action constructs society as a field of structured power relations, which themselves are open to contention by collective agency.

Traditional liberal thought, which has contributed to the emergence of the modern system of nation-states, has emphasized the separation between the two spheres of state and civil society, or the public and private realms.[20] While the state provides the space for political activity, civil society is thought to be a realm of free association. The implication of such theorizing is a narrow understanding of politics as formalized political activity

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[19] Ibid.

[20] For a similar reading, see John Ehrenberg, Civil Society: The Critical History of an Idea, (New York: New York University Press 1999)

within the framework of the state. Along these lines, therefore, civil society is an apolitical sphere of affective relations. Such ossified distinctions between "spheres" of human existence, while qualifying some as rational and others as realms of "free association," are possible within a "realist" and "institutionalist" framework whose metaphysics lies in the concealment of the arbitrariness of these demarcations. At the core of such distinctions is a dualism that is manifested in the separation of structure and agency.[21]

Recent theories have emphasized that politics, particularly power relations, runs deep in civil society in the form of structured social relations. However, such power relations often do not come to the fore directly in civil society, for they are consolidated through processes of "hegemonization." Understanding civil society as the sphere where power relations work indirectly renders problematic these associations by unraveling their underlying ways of legitimzation. It is in this context that one has to view the claim that given the global spread of neoliberalism, societies are experiencing what has been termed a "democracy deficit"[22] – particularly in the form of people not being party to the decisions that impact their everyday lives.[23] Several social movements have arisen across the world to address this problem.

Recent theories have characterized social movements as part of civil society and as seeking to advance this vision. Interestingly, advocates of neoliberalism have also

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[21] Recent writers such as Bourdieu have attempted to move away from the dualisms that have rankled traditional sociology. A comprehensive attempt at resolving this false dichotomy can be found in the body of his work.

[22] Arthur MacEwan, "Neoliberalism and Democracy: Market Power versus Democratic Power" in Alfredo Saad-Filho, Deborah Johnston, Neoliberalism: A critical Reader, (London, Ann Arbor (MI): Pluto Press 2005).

[23] Iris M. Young addresses the question of self-determination in relation to liberal democracies in Iris Marion Young, Inclusion and Democracy, (Oxford: Oxford University Press 2002).

championed the role of civil society in advancing "social development," after the retreat of the state from social welfare in the West and state aided development in the "Third World." It is important to remember the distinction between the two usages of the term civil society: the former refers to an associational sphere whereas the latter refers to voluntary associations.

The main concern in this study, regarding social movements, is their ability to contribute to the democratization of social relations in civil society. A key proposition in this study is that given social movements belong to the realm of civil society, the hegemonic relations within this sphere are bound to work their way into the organization and everyday functioning of social movements, if the actors involved do not generate critical reflection on the hegemony operating within civil society.

The burden of this chapter, therefore, is to develop a theoretical framework to guide the analysis of the social movement in question, and understand the democratization of social relations. This chapter has three broad sections, each of which is divided into subsections. In the first section, the dominant theories of social movements, particularly emerging from North America and Western Europe – primarily Collective Behavior theories, Resource Mobilization, Political Process, and New Social Movements – will be critically reviewed. Such an exercise is expected to contribute to identifying the important factors to be considered, while developing a theoretical framework to guide the analysis. In the following sections, the concept of civil society will be discussed, particularly Antonio Gramsci's analysis of the connections between civil society and hegemony. The final section will develop a theoretical framework, drawing on the preceding discussions, to guide the analysis of the relationship between

civil society and hegemony, and the potential of social movements to effect democratization through counter-hegemonic or reflexive social action.

<div align="center">**Theories of Social Movements**</div>

Theories of Collective Behavior:

The classical theoretical paradigm on social movements was influenced largely by the structural functionalist paradigm of Durkheim[24] and Parsons[25]. The catchall phrase "collective behavior," which characterized everything from panics, rumors, crowds, mobs, fashion, and behavior in disasters to social movements, was used to distinguish certain kinds of behavior as different from conventional behavior. Collective behavior was deemed "noninstitutionalized behavior," as opposed to the institutional nature of conventional actions.[26]

Prior to the 1960s, social movements were viewed largely as "abnormal" phenomena whose irrationality was emphasized by characterizing them as non-institutional. Cohen points out that such actions were thought to be "not guided by existing social norms but is formed to meet undefined or unstructured situations."[27] Inevitably, such explanations, emanating from what has been referred to as "breakdown

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[24] Emile Durkheim, <u>Pragmatism and Sociology</u>, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 1983).

[25] Parsons. <u>The structure of social action.</u>

[26] Gary T Marx, James L. Wood. "Strands of Theory and Research in Collective Behavior", <u>Annual Review of Sociology</u>, (1975, 1), pp. 363-428.

[27] Jean L. Cohen, "Strategy or Identity: New Theoretical Paradigms and Contemporary Social Movements", <u>Social Research</u>, (1985, 52:4 Winter), p. 672.

theories"[28] – movements arose out of the breakdown of social control or inadequate normative integration – were not very charitable to social movements, and were extremely limited in explaining the phenomena with reference to society.

On these lines, Kornhauser proposed that social movements are a product of mass societies, whereby only the most marginal people engage in such forms of collective behavior.[29] Similarly, Neil Smelser thought of social movements ("norm-oriented movements") as collective behavior ("outbursts") engaged in by those who experience a disconnect between generalized norm and their structural condition.[30] This schism was characterized by "structural strain" that resulted from shifts in social structure caused by a variety of phenomena, such as economic crises, war, mass migration, catastrophes, and technological change. According to Smelser, structural strain involved "the existence of ambiguities, deprivations, tensions, conflicts, and discrepancies in the social order."[31]

Individuals participate in collective behavior as a result of their discontent, frustration, and aggression that emanates from the structural strain caused by rapid social change. Thus movements are thought to originate from generalized beliefs and seek to effect norm changes.[32] Accordingly, Smelser proposed a model for explaining collective action that went like this: structural strain is followed by generalized beliefs that lead people to short circuit the system.

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[28] Bert Useem, "Breakdown Theories of Collective Action", Annual Review of Sociology, (1998, 24), pp. 215-238.

[29] William Kornhauser, The Politics of Mass Society, (Glencoe, IL: Free Press 1959).

[30] Neil J Smelser, The Theory of Collective Behavior. (New York: Free Press 1963).

[31] Marx and Long, "Strands of Theory and Research in Collective Behavior", p. 376

[32] Smelser. The Theory of Collective Behavior.

These theories of collective behavior largely viewed social psychological factors as causing social movements. In systemic terms, they were thought of as causing "social disequilibrium" primarily because of problems with integrating particular groups – mostly the lower classes. Following the systemic analogy, it was thought that such social movements followed a life cycle that could be observed. However, with the emergence of movements in the 1960s, these theories of collective behavior were found to be insufficient to explain social movements, because they viewed collective action as irrational. Additionally, however, they have also been criticized for being deterministic and tautological.[33] The "Resource Mobilization" approach and the identity-oriented paradigm emerged, in the US and Western Europe respectively, to address these issues.[34]

Resource Mobilization Approach:

With the publication of Mancur Olson's *Logic of Collective Action* (1965), the "irrationality" of social movements gave way to the view that they are very much rational. Following on this, the Resource Mobilization (RM) approach attempted to explain social movements as actions engaged in by "rational" individuals. This approach, presented as a "partial theory," was meant to correct the general tendency of "classical" movement theorists to focus on the social psychological aspects of social movements. According to McCarthy and Zald, the main examples of the RM, instead of seeking to understand movements as emerging from "shared grievances and generalized beliefs (loose ideologies) about causes and means of reducing grievances", sought to explain the

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[33] Alan Scott, Ideology and the new social movements, (London, Boston: Unwyn Hyman, 1990).

[34] Cohen. "Strategy or Identity: New Theoretical Paradigms and Contemporary Social Movements", p.673

causes of a social movement's growth, development, and decline with reference to "structural theories of social processes."[35] In this section, the main tenets of RM are described and then critiqued.

To begin, the ontological assumptions made by RM are worth considering. RM assumes that society is constituted by rational individuals who seek constantly to maximize their benefits and minimize losses. Accordingly, the individual actors, the institutions they confront, and the organization of social movements are thought to work in ways similar to the market.

Therefore, instead of focusing on the omnipresent structural discontent (which according to them, "may be defined, created, and manipulated by issue entrepreneurs"), practitioners of RM focus on the structures and processes within social movements. According to them, deprivation and grievances (loose ideologies) are at best a secondary component in explaining the emergence of social phenomena. Instead, they attach more emphasis to the possible resources of a movement, and the nature of the organizations established, in order to explain better a social movement. Furthermore, according to RM, the role of persons and outside institutions that may get involved in a movement are crucial to defining its prospects.

Consistent with these ontological assumptions, RM practitioners place enormous significance on the resources (money and labor) that a movement can generate, which are often sought outside the movement, primarily among benevolent elites. Along with

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[35] John D. McCarthy, Mayer N. Zald. "Resource Mobilization and Social Movements: A Partial Theory," The American Journal of Sociology, (82:6 (May 1977)), pp. 1214-16.

Turner and Killian,[36] McCarthy and Zald assume that the role of these elite persons and groups in making resources available is crucial to making a social movement. This makes the involvement of "outsiders" a central factor in determining the fate of a movement. Along with resources, the organization of the movement becomes significant in determining the outcome, and thus analysts are exhorted to focus on the forms of movement organization. Above all, "costs and rewards" explain individual and organizational involvement in movement activity.

Who, then, are the movement participants, according to RM? While those who may benefit from a movement are its initial participants, more important are "conscience constituents" who may provide resources and support, without having any significant commitment to the values espoused by the movement. Therefore, the strategies and tactics of the movement should revolve around winning over the conscience constituents, particularly because these elite may have disposable incomes that they may give to a movement, particularly if the movement's participants are not "well-heeled."

Following on this economistic vision of society, a "normalized" social movement works like an industry. This vision is clearly manifest in the way RM views the relationship between society and social movement: "Society provides the infrastructure that social movement industries and other industries utilize. The aspects utilized include communication media and expense, levels of affluence, degree of access to institutional centers, preexisting networks, and occupational structure and growth."[37]

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[36] Ralph H. Turner, Lewis M. Killian, Collective Behavior, 2nd ed. (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall 1972).

[37] McCarthy and Zald. "Resource Mobilization and Social Movements: A Partial Theory," p.1218.

Accordingly, RM builds a typology of organizations. Social Movements (SM) are distinguished from the Social Movement Industry (SMI), with the former being broader. The SMI, according to McCarthy and Zald, resembles the "concept of industry in economics," and Social Movement Organizations (SMOs) are similar to firms that constitute an industry. A social movement works through SMOs and any given social movement may have many SMOs. Finally, there is the Social Movement Sector (SMS) that "consists of all SMIs in a society no matter to which SM they are attached".[38] Such a typology, with a strong resemblance to the way the economy operates, is built to explain the levels of organization in social movements and the resources such organization can muster, because the two are thought together to be capable of explaining action. Following on this logical scheme of instrumental rationality, and employing the typology, McCarthy and Zald establish various hypotheses about the conditions necessary to make social movements work most effective.

Obviously this model, working within a neo-institutionalist framework, presents a variety of problems, including the ontological assumptions made in the explanatory schema. First, there is the problematic assumption regarding the nature of rationality. McCarthy and Zald, in equating cost-benefit analysis with rationality, mistake the logic of the market for society. Such a tendency to equate rationality with logic of the market and cost benefit calculus is part of rational choice theory that presents a unique view of the individual and society. While the individual is purported to be rational, in reality this view of individuals amounts to reducing them to monads that are capable of merely receiving and processing signals (information) from the market/society and making decisions consistent with this framework. Furthermore, a monad relates to other monads

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[38] Ibid. p.1219

only within the cost-benefit rationale. A conglomerate of such monads is society, while the market is the central organizing mechanism. Although such a presentation of society fits neatly with the neoliberal ideology that is currently in vogue, a distorted image of the individual and society is presented. Most important about this rendition is that social movements are constituted by individuals guided narrowly by instrumental rationality.

The idea of resources is presented in a dualist fashion. It is as if "resources" or resourceful persons are available and a movement, through its efficient organization, has to attract these elements. This is a limited understanding of resources, and one that may more often than not fail the movements of marginalized and oppressed people. Instead of such a view of resources, it may be possible, particularly for movements of poor people, to raise resources from within, through collective alterations. This issue will be explored in the chapter that analyzes the Plachimada movement.

Another glaring problem with the RM is the inability to view social movements as protest activity and therefore political, albeit not "normalized politics." In this regard, McCarthy and Zald present an abstract notion of society. Society is not viewed to arise from concrete social relations, which leads to the formation of components such as classes (although they themselves admit to differential access to resources) that are in contention with each other. Like many other approaches, the method proposed by RM is ahistorical in seeking to explain social movements. Clearly, social movements that are often vehicles of protest are here "normalized" as industries by RM. As in the case of capitalist firms, social movements are thought to compete with one another to sell themselves to the potential "sponsors" – i.e., the benevolent elite who may give away

some of their dispensable income, even though they may not share the values of the movement.[39]

Steven Buechler has identified other problems with this approach.[40] RM has tended to ignore the function of power and marginalization of groups, communities, and classes as part of social processes. Social movements are not thought to emerge from collective articulation of social problems, thus leading to mobilization for action. Thus, Buechler says, RM has "downplayed the role of grievances."[41] Along with "grievances," ideology has also been marginalized in RM. In fact, this approach tends to equate grievances with ideology and think of them as "secondary" preconditions for social movement activity.

Another serious problem is the main thrust of RM – the nature of organization. Buechler points out that RM, if not explicitly, assumes that a bureaucratic type of centralized and formal organizations work better and more efficiently towards attracting potential "conscience adherents" who provide the resources. Such formal organization is also thought to help the movement interact more effectively with the state or media. Also, because social movements are defined abstractly as "preference structures," the SMOs are considered to be the concrete organs of the movement. This leads to the most important problem – the question of agency. In RM, the agency of a social movement is manifest in the SMOs. Simply put, organizations, without much care to the internal

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[39] Ronaldo Munck, Globalization and Contestation: The New Great Counter-Movement. (London and New York: Routledge 2007).

[40] Buechler, Steven M. "Beyond Resource Mobilizaiton? Emerging Trends in Social Movement Theory," in Steven M. Buechler, F. Kurt Cylke Jr., Social Movements: Perspectives and Issues, (Mountain View, Calif., London: Mayfield Publishing Company 1997).

[41] Ibid. p. 197

processes of their formation and the actors involved, are thought of as the agents that act. Given that organizations are defined in this way, agency within social movements is understood narrowly.

Finally, RM is largely silent about who engages in collective action and how collective identity is formed within the movement. As Buechler points out, "RM remains remarkably uninterested in who engages in collective action and how they view themselves and their allies in struggle."[42] How identities are constructed within movements is a question taken up by the new social movement theorists, and will be discussed in the subsequent sections. However, what is important to note is that at any given point in a movement, there is bound to be diversity – the formation of a collective identity is a dialogic process and not easily completed. Given this, a crucial question arises: how do movements deal with the question of internal democracy? Or, how do movements deal with the democratization of social relations that emerge from within? These questions, although not addressed by RM, are important to understand social movements that are seeking the empowerment of marginalized communities in a hegemonic social order that is increasingly global.

In sum, RM is silent on the nature of power relations, the way they except hegemony, and how social movements seek to question directly the exercise of power. Instead, society is driven by the invisible hand of the market, whereby benevolent elites are the partners of the activists. Nevertheless, some of the questions raised above, particularly with regard to the nature of organizations, their internal dynamics, and how they relate to the course of the movement, are important when attempting to understand a social movement.

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[42] Ibid. p.207

The Political Process Model:

There have been other approaches, such as the polity models, that sought to improve on RM without discarding the fundamental assumptions of the latter. They will not be discussed here. However, the political process model, proposed by Doug McAdam as a corrective to the deficiencies in classical theories of social movements, particularly RM, merits attention.

Unlike RM, the political process model takes power as a crucial factor in understanding the nature of a society. This theory begins with the general observation that power and wealth are concentrated among the elites in society, thereby leaving large sections of people excluded from the mainstream political processes. Social movements, then, are "rational attempts by excluded groups to mobilize sufficient political leverage to advance collective interests through noninstitutionalized means."[43] Clearly, social movements are understood as political phenomena, albeit outside the institutionalized sphere. Further, McAdam calls for a theoretical approach that views social movements as continuous phenomena (processes), rather than characterized by discrete stages of development that are clearly discernible.

The central theoretical concern of the political process model is the state (although McAdam uses the phrase "political system" in place of "state") in which some groups are included (the elites) and many others excluded. According to McAdam, those who are members of the polity – the elite that enjoy power – have a vested interest in maintaining the *status quo* and keeping out unrepresented groups. Correspondingly, there

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[43] Doug McAdam, "The Political Process Model" in Steven M. Buechler, F. Kurt Cylke Jr. <u>Social Movements: Perspectives and Issues,</u> (Mountain View, Calif., London: Mayfield Publishing Company 1997).

are "members" of the political establishment and the "challengers" who use social movements to gain access to key political institutions. Following Gamson, McAdam suggests that such an establishment can be thought of as competitive.[44]

A crucial point of departure from the RM is that while the latter tends to reify the power relations in society (by taking it as a given), the political process model believes that there is nothing inevitable – structural or otherwise – to the existing power relations. This means that, according to the model, people have the ability to challenge the *status quo* if they so desire.[45] Although structural power is routinized, challenges to power can happen on an everyday basis. Despite the exclusionary nature of the polity and the ability of people to challenge this system, critiques are rare because "the force of environmental constraints is usually sufficient to inhibit mass action."[46] However, given that the strength of the establishment is not a constant and given to fluctuations, challengers can engage in "insurgency" to gain access to the decision making processes.

According to this model, given that most people are often habituated to their conditions of existence, subjective transformation is necessary for the generation of a social movement. This, in turn, is expected to generate the "will" or commitment of the activists in the movement. Such a transformation, referred to as "cognitive liberation," is one of the most significant aspects for McAdam's model: "Mediating between opportunity and action are people and the subjective meanings they attach to their situations."[47] While a variety of factors, such as the strength of the existing organizations

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[44] Ibid. p. 172-4

[45] Ibid.

[46] Ibid. p. 175

[47] Ibid. p. 182

in the activist community, or the nature of leadership, may help to advance a movement, the activists have to define a situation as favorable for insurgency.

Accordingly, the aggrieved population comes together in the form of an organized social movement. The strength of the organization (organizational readiness), along with a collective reading of the prospects for successful insurgency among the activists and the availability of an appropriate political opportunity (the external environment), are the necessary conditions for the movement to take-off.

McAdam cites the necessary conditions for movement to emerge proposed by Piven and Cloward[48]. According to them, this process entails a transformation of both consciousness and behavior. First, "the system" as experienced and perceived by the people loses legitimacy. Those who normally accept the legitimacy of institutional arrangements, become conscious of their unjust character. Second, this leads to the people getting rid of the prevailing fatalism – losing the sense that the existing arrangements are inevitable – and beginning to assert their "rights" and demands for change. And finally, or third, people who otherwise think of themselves as helpless gain a sense of efficacy, and come to believe that they have some capacity to alter their lot. Interestingly, there is enough room in Piven and Cloward's analysis to open up a discussion of the routinized functioning of hegemonic structures and the counter-hegemonic work of social movements. While such a theoretical direction may have enriched the understanding of social movements, McAdam does not proceed on these lines despite the presence of a vast literature on hegemony.

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[48] Frances Fox Piven, Richard A. Cloward, <u>Poor People's Movements: Why they Succeed, How they Fail</u>, (New York: Vintage 1977).

Once a movement is generated, the interplay between this activity and the political establishment – particularly the pressures on the social movement to sustain its organizational strength and the responses from the political establishment to exert social control – decide the fate of any protest. Interestingly, the optimism that generates the movement fades away as it develops. In the absence of any consideration of contention between the hegemonic classes and the counter-hegemonic movement, the discussion about the development of social movements really ends up being a statement on how they decline. As McAdam states: "Even as insurgents exploit the opportunities… the movement sets in motion processes that are likely, over time, to create a set of contradictory demands destructive of insurgency."[49]

An important influence of RM is the belief that the informal organization of the movement will have to soon give way to more formal structures, particularly centralized leadership. Like RM, political process theory also postulates that only such a transformation will allow the movement to mobilize sufficient resources and survive over a period of time against the possible onslaught of the political system in the form of social control. Further, also assumed is that only a strong organization will be able to continue to attract more people, thereby eliminating what Olson called the "free rider" problem – a problem that also rankled the RM advocates.[50] Piven and Cloward have

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[49] McAdam, "The Political Process Model", p. 185.

[50] Olson used the phrase 'free rider problem' to refer to the perceived problem of the movement participants having to make sacrifices of time and resources, whereas the fruits – public goods – of the movement are evenly distributed, even to those who were not participating in the movement (thus, the concern about the 'free rider'). As a result of this, it is assumed, many would find it beneficial to remain outside of the social movement and enjoy the benefits of the 'public goods' won by others. Mancur Olson, The Logic of Collective Action: Public Goods and the Theory of Groups. (Cambridge, Massachussetts: Harvard University Press 1971).

argued that a formal organization, by spawning processes that destroy insurgency, is antithetical to the success of movements.[51]

Two possible fallouts of formal organization and dependence on external resources are oligarchization and cooptation. Oligarchization is the process whereby a group of leaders emerge as superior to the activists, and thus appropriate the power to make decisions regarding the direction of the movement. Such a process can lead to a lack of democracy, as the original participants lose interest in the everyday functioning of the movement. Oligarchization can also lead to cooptation, because the external sources of funds and other resources wield considerable influence on the leaders and redirect the movement in detrimental ways.[52]

While the type of organization is critical to understanding how a social movement works, the dichotomy between formal and informal organizations is suspect. While recognizing such a dichotomy, McAdam does not go on to analyze the nature of formal organization within social movements. In the absence of such a concrete understanding, the formality of structures within organizations is taken for granted. In transcending such dichotomies, it is important to discuss concretely the internal dynamics of movements, the dialogues and debates, and any drive towards internal heterogeneity.

The important point of departure for the political process model is the the pursuit of "political power" as the main spur of social movement activity. While this may be a significant point of difference with the McCarthy and Zald version of RM, the political process model also works within the confines of the "neo-institutionalist" paradigm. This means that the conception of power is rather limited.

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[51] Piven and Cloward, <u>Poor People's Movements</u>.

[52] McAdam, "The Political Process Model".

Accordingly, "insurgency" amounts to merely the social movement gaining strength and trying to bargain with the political establishment for inclusion. The neo-institutionalist and dualist assumptions that underlie the model prevent it from developing a better understanding of agency. Agency is understood in a limited sense as 'structural action' rather than "structuring action."

Politics is assumed to be activity engaged in by people in their roles as citizens. Therefore, the corridors of power, in the form of the political establishment, exclude many citizens from the decision-making that affects their everyday lives. The affected citizens ("minority") then seek to mount an insurgency with the hope of gaining access to the political establishment. Such a conception of activism is built on dualist assumptions that the political and social spheres are separate from each other. This schism makes possible the belief that power is limited to the traditional corridors of politics.

Power is thus conceived to be a thing and not a relation. Nonetheless, the understanding that power is a concrete dimension of social relations stimulates the realization that power is "social" and plays out in everyday lives of people. As a result of the above mentioned narrow conceptualization of power, there is no exploration of how hegemony works in social life, thereby leaving the model unable to explain the nature of organizations.

New Social Movement Theory:

The idea that the social movements of the 1960s and 1970s were fundamentally different from the "traditional" movements – primarily associated with the parliamentary left such as the workers parties, trade unions etc. – came to the fore in the early 1980s. The earliest programmatic statements on the "new" phenomena – that came to be known as New Social Movements (NSMs) – were made by Alberto Melucci[53] and Habermas[54]. While the coinage New Social Movement Theory may present the image of a unified theory advanced to explain a clearly defined phenomena, in reality there has been many different, sometimes contradictory, views about the nature of NSMs.

Habermas provides the most elaborate statement on the NSMs by making a distinction between the system (economic-administrative complex) and the life world. In the post-war era, a compromise was reached between capital and labor through the intervention of the welfare state, whereby capitalist growth was accompanied by a welfare policy that would ensure an adequate distribution of goods and services. This led to a situation where many labor/trade union movements did not challenge the fundamental institutional arrangements in capitalism; instead, they were more focused on "problems of distribution."

According to Habermas, New Social Movements (NSMs) view such arrangements and practices themselves – rooted in modernist assumptions such as high economic growth based on ever increasing production processes and the strengthening of the welfare state in acquiring the ability to regulate private lives – as problematic. The

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[53] Alberto Melucci, "The New Social Movements: A Theoretical Approach", <u>Social Science Information,</u> (1980, 19), pp. 199-226.

[54] Jurgen Habermas, "New Social Movements", <u>Telos</u> (1981, 49), pp. 33-37.

new social movements are concerned with the "grammar of forms of life," in an attempt to counter the "colonization of life world" that is a product of the "economic-administrative complex." In point of fact, they are undertaken by "those groups that are farther removed from the "productivist core" of performance in late capitalist societies, those who are more sensitive to the self-destructive consequences of growth in complexity."[55]

Such conflicts in society – in areas of "cultural reproduction, social integration, and socialization" – have spawned movements from various positions and cannot be reduced to the deterministic view of a particular class being the historical vehicle of social action and universal emancipation. Habermas points out that the NSMs often have the character of retreatist or resistance movements.

NSM is an umbrella term for various struggles that seek to resist the rationalization of the life-world. Habermas says that these conflicts arise "at the seam between system and life-world." Unlike earlier when the working class led socialist movements, many participants of the NSMs belong to the "new middle classes." Instead of following instrumental rationality, these movements often emphasize the "affective" and "expressive" politics of the "first person." In this regard, they seek to provide an "alternative praxis" to the institutionalized roles (such as client, consumer, or citizen) through which people interact on a daily basis. Therefore, they emphasize participation as central to movement activity and often participation is an end in-itself.[56] The point is that such a participatory model of movement activity can lead to potentially "partial

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[55] Habermas, "The New Social Movements," p. 34.

[56] Claus Offe, "New Social Movements: Challenging the Boundaries of Institutional Politics", <u>Social Research</u>, (1985, 52:4 (Winter)).

dissolution of social roles" and develop "counter-institutions" from within the life world.[57]

Like Habermas, other major theorists NSMs have sought to advance their own respective ontologies of society and the nature of social movements. For instance, Manuel Castells has emphasized the transformation of the urban space with his characterization of contemporary societies of the developed West as "network societies."[58] To Castells, urban social movements were a product of contention within the state and other political forces to redefine and reorganize urban life. While the dominant social order seeks to define urban space and social relations to suit the interests of commodification and bureaucratic domination, grass roots social movements seek to establish cultural identity and political autonomy through solidarity.[59]

Melucci, on the other hand, emphasized largely the cultural processes of contemporary societies through which domination is reproduced daily in "postindustrial" or "advanced" societies.[60] Given the flow of information in contemporary societies, the struggle is for control over these "symbols." Thus Melucci writes: "Control over information production, accumulation, and circulation depends on codes which organize and make information understandable. In complex societies, power consists more and more of operational codes, formal rules, knowledge organizers. In the operational logic,

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[57] Habermas, "The New Social Movements", p. 36-7.

[58] Manuel Castells, The Rise of the Network Society, (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishers 2000).

[59] Manuel Castells, The City and Grassroots, (Berkeley: University of California Press 1983).

[60] Melucci, "The New Social Movements: A Theoretical Approach."

information is not a shared resources accessible to everybody, but an empty sign, the key of which is controlled by only a few people."[61]

The field of knowledge thus becomes a site of power and conflict. Transgressing institutionalized norms, and going beyond the rules of the political system and social structure, is emphasized as an important social movement goal. Melucci understands social structure to be socially constructed. Accordingly, NSMs emphasize processes of identity construction through collective solidarity. In fact, often the very purpose of NSMs is the construction of identities that seek to break from the ascribed roles and identities. Based on these premises, Melucci defines social movements as "a form of collective action (a) based on solidarity, (b) carrying on a conflict, (c) breaking the limits of the system in which action occurs."[62] NSMs, according to Melucci, emphasize the "social" and "cultural" rather than the "political" dimensions of collective life, and seek to ensure that they are not coopted by the political system.

Alain Touraine explains NSMs while using his concept of historicity. According to Touraine, in the postindustrial or "programmed" societies, people have become suspicious of metasocial sources of order. Given such a condition, people are now capable of exercising their agency, thereby constructing their own knowledge systems so that they can engage collectively in the self-production of society.[63] This, to Touraine, is historicity. Like Habermas, for Touraine the central problematic is the contention between the controlling and maximizing imperatives of the system and the people who

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[61] Alberto Melucci, "The Symbolic Challenge of Contemporary Movements," in Steven M. Buechler, F. Kurt Cylke Jr. Social Movements: Perspectives and Issues, (Mountain View, Calif., London: Mayfield Publishing Company, 1997) p. 267.

[62] Ibid. p. 262.

[63] Alain Touraine, The Self-Production of Society. (Chicago: Chicago University Press 1977).

seek to increase their individuality. NSMs emerge as part of the ongoing struggle between classes over relations of domination. According to Touraine, the main classes in a programmed society are the consumers/clients and the managers/technocrats, with the latter dominating the former.

With such a variety of renditions it is foolhardy to "ontologize" NSMs as a unitary phenomenon, or provide one concrete theory that explains collective action. Therefore, instead of taking any of these as exhaustively representative of NSM theory, the focus will be some of the common themes that emerge in the work of these theorists.

One theme that emerges, without much controversy among the various theorists, is that the NSMs are characteristic of a newer form of society that is variously referred to as "post-industrial," "advanced capitalist," or sometimes simply "advanced," "late capitalist," or "programmed."[64] Implicit is that NSMs are unique to this kind of society. Thus, NSMs are thought to represent "post-material values" and thereby do not seek redistribution, but instead direct democracy, living in cooperation, or self-help.[65] While the initial impetus of advancing NSM theory was to break with the "historicist" or deterministic tendencies in classical Marxism, linking NSMs to historically specific forms of societies falls into the same deterministic trap.

Nonetheless, it is claimed that NSMs "do not bear a clear relation to structural roles of the participants."[66] According to Johnston and others, there is no particular social base for the NSMs. However, as opposed to this view, the middle class nature of NSM

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[64] Similar theorizing is discernible in Offe also; Offe, "New Social Movements: Challenging the Boundaries of Institutional Politics."

[65] Cohen, "Strategy or Identity: New Theoretical Paradigms and Contemporary Social Movements."

[66] Hank Johnston, Enrique Larana, Joseph R. Gusfield, "Identities, Grievances and New Social Movements," in Enrique Larrana, Hank Johnston and Joseph R. Gusfield (ed.) New Social Movements: From Ideology to Identity, (Philadelphia: Temple University Press. 1994), p. 6

participants has been often emphasized. Claus Offe, for instance, has attempted to sketch the class characteristic of NSM participants. According to him, they represent the new middle class, elements of the old middle class, and "decommodified" laborers (the unemployed).[67]

Accordingly, NSMs display ideological pluralism, seen as a decisive move away from the Marxist conception of ideology. Further, ideology is socially constructed as part of social movement activity, rather than emerging from a structural location in society.[68] As opposed to the Marxist emphasis on revolution or systemic change, NSMs are thought to have a "pragmatic orientation," particularly in the form of institutional reform. Thus, Cohen says that NSMs advance "a self-understanding that abandons revolutionary dreams in favor of the idea of structural reform, along with a defense of civil society that does not seek to abolish the autonomous functioning of political and economic systems – in a phrase, self-limiting radicalism."[69] Implied is that NSMs have a "'democratization dynamic' directed to everyday life and the expansion of the civil versus political dimension of society."[70]

This means that NSMs are seen primarily as social rather than political.[71] Political, in this context, refers to the sphere of the state, and its institutions and agencies – the formalized political establishment. Hence, while the earlier workers movements

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[67] Offe, "New Social Movements: Challenging the Boundaries of Institutional Politics."

[68] Steven M. Buechler, "New Social Movement Theories," in Buechler, Steven M and F. Kurt Cylke Jr., Social Movements: Perspectives and Issues, (Mountain View, Calif., London: Mayfield Publishing Company 1997).

[69] Cohen, "Strategy or Identity: New Theoretical Paradigms and Contemporary Social Movements," p. 664.

[70] Johnston et al. "Identities, Grievances and New Social Movements," p. 7

[71] Melucci, "The Symbolic Challenge of Contemporary Movements."

were "political" in making demands on the state (mainly to advance citizenship and representation), the NSMs are thought to engage the cultural sphere. Consistent with this, many NSMs are located in civil society and do not "challenge the state directly."[72]

This idea is consistent with the theories advanced by Habermas, Melucci, and Touraine. The emphasis is on symbolic action in civil society or the cultural sphere. According to Cohen, civil society is seen in "action terms as the domain of struggles, public spaces and political processes. It comprises the social realm in which the creation of norms, identities, and social relations of domination and resistance are located."[73]

Based on the above discussion, and despite such ambiguous dichotomization, the social is understood as necessarily political – while trying to keep away from "mainstream" political institutions, these new activists stress that politics is embedded in structures of everyday life. However, while this seems to be the implication, there has been no explication of this in the writings of the prominent theorists. Therefore, NSM theories have faced criticism for avoiding the crucial question regarding the nature of politics. NSM theorists have also been criticized for ignoring the political dimension of many social movements, as they overemphasize the social and cultural. Some critics have argued that this redirection represents an effort to discredit the Marxist views on social collective action.[74]

Another theme often emphasized is that NSMs seek to bring about social change through developing alternative values and lifestyles.[75] Especially important is the

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[72] Scott, Ideology and New Social Movements, p. 17.

[73] Cohen, "Strategy or Identity: New Theoretical Paradigms and Contemporary Social Movements," p. 700.

[74] David Plotke, "What's So New about New Social Movements?" Socialist Review, (1990, 20), p.81-102.

[75] Scott, Ideology and New Social Movements.

conscious construction of identity collectively by the people that are part of the movements, which is often taken as an end, rather than a means.[76] Often such identity constructions are "acted out" through expressive and affective means. Referring to gay/lesbian and hippie movements, Johnston and others say that "the movement becomes the focus for the individual's definition of himself or herself, and action within the movement is a complex mix of the collective and individual confirmations of identity."[77]

According to Scott, the organizational forms of NSMs parallel their ideological project.[78] He identifies some of the characteristics of NSMs. First, they are likely to be locally based on small groups that address specific local issues. Second, they are characterized by what Tarrow refers to as "cycles of protest."[79] And third, they tend to be internally heterogeneous, with weak hierarchies and "loose systems of authority." As Offe points out, consistent with their anti-bureaucratic stance, they tend to rotate leadership, vote on all issues, and do not have permanent structures, thereby emphasizing openness and decentralization.[80] In a nutshell, because NSMs are thought to take place in the civil society/cultural sphere, which they claim is autonomous vis-a-vis the state, they stress ideological plurality, open and fluid organizations, the rejection of political power, identity construction, collective solidarity, critical reflection, and "post-material" values.

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[76] Cohen, "Strategy or Identity: New Theoretical Paradigms and Contemporary Social Movements"; Johnston et al. Johnston et al. "Identities, Grievances and New Social Movements," p. 7.

[77] Johnston et al, Johnston et al. "Identities, Grievances and New Social Movements," p. 8.

[78] Scott, Ideology and New Social Movements.

[79] Sydney Tarrow, "Cycle of Protest," in Steven M Buechler, F. Kurt Cylke Jr. Social Movements: Perspectives and Issue, Mountain View, Calif., London: Mayfield Publishing Company 1997).

[80] Offe, "New Social Movements: Challenging the Boundaries of Institutional Politics."

Some of the suggestions of NSM theorists are worth considering in building a framework for analyzing the social movement that originated in Plachimada. As Melucci emphasizes, social movements should not to be seen as discrete quantities that are available for direct observation and analysis, as they develop on a stage by stage basis. Social movements are complex phenomena which, in order to understand their multidimensionality, have to be placed in the complex ensemble of power relations in society. While it may be possible to observe power relations on an everyday basis in particular spaces, the exercise of power often transcends the immediacy of space and time. Therefore, one has to adopt a rather broad view of time and space, as something of a long duree, in order to understand the construction of power relations in an increasingly global social order where social movements are located.

However, NSMs and their theorists have been criticized on a number of issues. A serious criticism has been that many of the characteristics enumerated by NSM theorists are not necessarily observable in actual movements.[81] While this criticism may be valid, identifying the empirical markers of NSMs, and taxonomizing social movements, is not the burden of this study. Therefore, the merit of this criticism will not be examined here. For the purposes of this study, it is important to scrutinize closely how NSM theorists conceive of power and hegemony, their understanding of politics despite their repudiation of the "political system," the nature of civil society, and the emphasis placed on identities and ideologies based on (if at all) critical reflection and collective solidarity. Also important is how NSM theorists characterize the prevailing social order.

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[81] Nelson A. Pichardo, "New Social Movements: A Critical Review," Annual Review of Sociology, (1997 23) p. 411-30

To begin, most of the mainstream NSM theorists, in seeking to move away from the inadequacies in the deterministic traditions in Marxism, are proponents of a "Post-Marxist" paradigm and draw inspiration primarily from the liberal-pluralist tradition. The important questions, for the purposes of this study, are 1) the way these movements conceive power and 2) how the social actions, as part of these movements, are related to the conception of power. Both of these questions define the vision of politics in a social movement, which provides the space where such visions can be developed through collective critical reflection.

Jean Cohen uses the phrase "self-limiting radicalism" to refer to the political practice of social movements[82]. Cohen arrives at this phrase as a decisive move away from the totalizing "metanarrative" of revolutionary emancipation that Marxist movements proposed and the determinisms that crept into their policies and practices. Accordingly, Cohen proposes that NSMs are associated with advancing civil society (in opposition to the state) in a reformist and incremental fashion, while differentiating this region from the state and economy. Thus, Cohen comments that "… democratically structured associations and public spaces, a plurality of types of political actors and action within civil society, are viewed as ends in themselves. Indeed, many of the actors interpret their actions as attempts to renew a democratic political culture and to reintroduce the normative dimension of social action into political life. This is the meaning of self-limiting radicalism."[83] This is a decisive effort to move away from the deterministic view that a particular class holds the key to truth, which naturally makes

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[82] Cohen, "Strategy or Identity: New Theoretical Paradigms and Contemporary Social Movements."

[83] Ibid. p. 670

this group the vanguard of a collective action. As opposed to this, the creation of a plurality of identities and solidarities are proposed as the aim of practice.

While such forms of practice are important to deepening democracy, collective action also has to take into account the extant forms of power and how they are constructed and played out in the civil society that they seek to rescue. Society is constituted by relations of subjectivity and subjection, which more often than not, are predicated on power. Power tends to be persuasive, in that subjection happens often without volition. Therefore, while abjuring that the pursuit of power may be a decisive move toward democratizing social movements and the struggles of people, the focus should not move away from the prevailing power relations when trying to forge a new direction. Taking into account the forms of power that pervade the society will mean scrutinizing analytically the very composition of civil society. In the absence of such an effort, there is a potential danger of civil society becoming a mere refuge rather than a socially constructed space of contention and democratic spirit.

Mouffe,[84] working within the post-Marxist framework, proposes the idea of "political antagonism" to better explain the effort of the NSMs, or what she calls new democratic struggles. Political antagonism is premised on the idea that an individual is the site of multiple subjectivities. And the construction of the particular subjectivity relevant to a new democratic struggle happens through collective praxis. Additionally, political antagonisms are to be strengthened through collective struggles. This means that while a movement may pursue a particular antagonism, for instance to protect the

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[84] Chantal Mouffe, "Hegemony and New Political Subjects: Towards a New Concept of Democracy," in C. Nelson and L. Grossberg (eds.), Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture, (University of Illinois Press 1988), pp. 89-101.

environment, it may become an arena for praxis based on class, race, caste, or gender. Thus, politics is a form of action that addresses the concrete materiality of power that works through social relations, thereby structuring them not simply through brute force but hegemony.

A crucial question that arises in the context of this study is, given that NSMs are theorized as structurally linked to a historically specific form of society (variously called post-industrial, advanced etc. as mentioned above), how useful are these concepts and categories to assess the social movements in the developing or third world countries of the South? For instance, are issues such as commodification of social life, increasing bureaucratization of society, or the deep penetration of civil society by the state[85] relevant to the third world? Perhaps an answer can be found in the work of Enrique Dussel and the dependency theorists regarding the question of modernity and development. According to Dussel and others, the argument that the West modernized and the others have failed is fallacious. On the contrary, they argue the "others" of the East and South are part of the project of modernizing the West, although in a disadvantaged way.[86] Simply put, the persistent exploitative relationship put in place through imperialism, and the development of the world capitalist system, has been a precondition for specific forms of modernity in the West. This means that while the questions raised by NSM theorists – particularly related to democratization – have immense relevance for the societies of the South, there

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[85] Chantal Mouffe, "Towards a Theoretical Interpretation of 'New Social Movements'," in S. Hanninen, and Paldan (eds.) Rethinking Marx, (Berlin: Argument Sonderband AS 109 1984), p. 139-143.

[86] Enrique Dussel, "Beyond Eurocentrism: The World-System and the Limits of Modernity" in Frederic Jameson, Masao Miyoshi (eds.) The Cultures of Globalization, (Durham, London: Duke University of Press 1998).

is a need to analyze the historically specific ways in which these societies are subjected to exploitation within the global capitalist system.

David Slater has addressed the question of the suitability of NSM framework for analyzing the contemporary social movements in Latin America.[87] Slater identifies three important ways in which the Western societies, where NSMs were first theorized, and those in the third world differ from one another: first, in terms of the "configuration and density of civil society"; second, in terms of the "varying modalities of state intervention… or the state-society nexus"; and third, in the "forms of the insertion of [third world] societies into the world capitalist system."[88] In most Latin American countries, like others of the Third World, the pressing social problems that social movements seek to address are often related to the debt crisis and growing social inequality and poverty, which are often the effects of IMF policies. Along with these concerns are the inability of the state to tax the elites and raise money for social development and welfare. In the specific case of Latin America, there are issues related to "acute centralization of state power."[89] Despite these differences, the fundamental concerns of these societies, as with the West, revolve around questions related to autonomy, solidarity, direct participation and democracy,[90] and self-determination.[91] In emphasizing an indeterminate view of society and continuous democratization, along with their efforts against hierarchization and alienation, the NSMs have the potential to

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[87] David Slater, "New Social Movements and Old Political Questions: Rethinking State-Society Relations in Latin American Development" in International Journal of Political Economy, (1991 Spring), p. 32-65.

[88] Ibid. p. 42.

[89] Ibid. p. 44.

[90] Ibid.

[91] Iris Young. Inclusion and Democracy.

address these problems. However, whether they are able to address these in practice depends on not merely adopting these values, but also constantly being reflexive about not merely their practices and what they seek to achieve, but also the nature of civil society. The effort of this study is, therefore, to understand whether the social movement in Plachimada, invoking these very questions that NSMs raise, was able to realize democratization in practice, and how this effort might have changed the movement. In working towards a framework that guides the analysis, the idea of civil society that has become prominent along with NSMs is important.

Civil Society: Theoretical Considerations

Most countries of the world, particularly those in the "developing" or Third World, have been experiencing the rise of civil society since the 1980s, a time that also marked the ascendancy of the market in the global sphere. However, there has been some conceptual ambiguity about what constitutes civil society. This ambiguity is partly the result of the long history of the concept as it underwent many mutations in Western philosophy[92], and partly because of debates on the nature of specific social phenomena.

In traditional liberal thought, civil society is understood to have emerged with modernity, whereby the individual was "unencumbered" from the traditional binding ties and is able to participate in the civil, associational life of society based on volition. However, in the current intellectual scenario, the "voluntariness" that characterizes civil society has been equated with voluntary associations. Consistent with this maneuver, the term civil society has been used to refer to organizations, particularly Non Governmental

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[92] John Ehrenberg, Civil Society.

Organizations (NGOs), which are engaged in developmental and/or other activities linked to insuring "civility." The World Bank, a body that is credited with supporting and nurturing many NGOs, uses the term civil society to refer to the "wide array of non-governmental and not-for profit organizations that have a presence in public life, expressing the interests and values of their members or others, based on ethical, cultural, political, scientific, religious or philanthropic considerations."[93] Civil Society Organizations (CSOs), understood in this sense, include community groups, NGOs, labor unions, indigenous groups, charitable and faith-based organizations, professional associations, and foundations.

Because civil society is thought to be a domain of voluntary association and uncoerced collective action, a democratic polity is essential for its existence.[94] Critics of this currently "mainstream" view of civil society point out that its relationship to the market curtails its possibilities.[95] Moreover, those in the tradition of Antonio Gramsci have argued that civil society becomes an arena where the hegemony of the state and/or the market is legitimized. Within the framework of the market, civil society is expected to perform certain instrumental functions. On the contrary, the critics of market capitalism and what has been described as neoliberal globalization describe global civil society as the arena of struggle against this style of economy. In this sense, the global civil society is inspired by and includes several social and political movements that have come to have

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[93] (www.worldbank.org)

[94] Ehrenberg, Civil Society.

[95] James Petras, Henry Veltmeyer. Social Movements and State Power: Argentina, Brazil, Bolivia, Equador. (London, Ann Arobor (MI): Pluto Press 2005).

a transnational character.[96] This view claims to represent the interests of the community of individuals, where collective existence is the basis of cooperation and equitable sharing of power and control over resources, as opposed to the interest of the "Empire" marked by the authoritarian impulse and the concentration of power and wealth.[97] Evidently, civil society is an arena marked by the struggle for hegemony.

History of the Idea of Civil Society:

The point of this section is to trace the history of the idea of civil society in Western social and political thought. It must be admitted here that this brief history is by no means exhaustive, nor does it go into great detail about the theoretical elaborations of individual philosophers. Instead, the effort here is to identify the key dimensions and aspects of the idea of civil society as it emerged over centuries. There are two crucial aspects to civil society, particularly in its modern form. First, implicit in this characterization – a product of classical liberal theory – is that civil society is an element in the larger society, whose order is provided by a higher mechanism, which, in the case of modern liberal democratic societies, is the state. Here, civil society is understood as the realm where particular interests are advanced as opposed to the state that is universal. The state is thus expected to be a body that has no particular interests. Only such a state, liberal thinkers argued, could function effectively to maintain the "freedom" of civil society. Second, the modern form of civil society is understood to be an associational space characterized by free individuals with unencumbered selves. These free

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[96] Mary Kaldor, <u>Global Civil Society.</u> (Oxford, New York: Oxford University Press 2003).

[97] Michael Hardt, Antonio Negri. <u>Empire.</u> (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press 2000).

individuals, on their own volition, decide to enter into society so that they can pursue their particular interests and, also, in the process, lessen the possibility of the state being taken over by particular interests. At the outset, a brief history of the development of civil society – particularly the first dimension mentioned above – and its precursors will be attempted, followed by a critique.

The development of civil society has to be understood in the context of the ontology that has operated traditionally in Western thought, that is, between the binaries that are thought to constitute the society. These binaries have been variously categorized as the general and the particular, the public and the private, and more recently state and civil society. Although the term civil society is relatively new, the idea of civil society as a realm of individual and/or collective expressions that are contrasted with the State, or an ontologically external source of social order, has always existed. This strategy has meant that, traditionally, society has been defined in a fashion to indicate that it does not stand alone, and has always been discussed in relation to a higher/external source of social order. This line of thinking continues in liberal democracy where civil society, which is thought of as a space for free association of individuals, continues to be seen as "apolitical" and the state as the place of politics.

Historically, however, this subordinate relation to the state has been restrictive of the autonomy that people can enjoy within civil society. Although the term civil society emerged much later, as mentioned above, the ontological distinction between a source of power external to people that can be used to control them has been always employed. Plato understood the individual as error-prone. With skewed knowledge, people were not trusted to be self-directing. Therefore, if they were let free to undertake politics by

themselves without regulation, chaos would result from the various groups that hold different opinions. Therefore, Plato decreed that all knowledge had to be subordinated to eternal forms or Ideas. The resultant hierarchy of knowledge led to the production of norms and values that valued individual experience as the lowest source of epistemological validity. Civil expressions, the realm of individual experiences, therefore, were thought to be a realm that needed to be controlled by a superior domain.

Aristotle has been considered the forerunner of functionalism. He thought of society as representing a pre-defined system that has to be maintained by sub-expressions (similar to the contemporary notion of Civil Society), as long as they fulfill the overall plan of the society. While Aristotle did not share Plato's distrust of civil expressions, for he thought that these institutions had important functions to play, they had to work according to the interests of overall society. In this sense, the parts are submitted to the whole, with the logic of the whole providing the framework for the parts to function. Aristotle inaugurated the body imagery of society: there are various organs (sub-expressions) that have to operate to contribute to the functioning of the larger body.

During the medieval times, what Weber refers to as theodicy (social order grounded in religious cosmology), provided the grounds for epistemology. Order was divinely mandated and social life was seen as a manifestation of divine action. Within this world-view mediated by the divine principle, families, or guilds, for example, were thought to play particular functions that contributed to the whole; in other words, the Aristotelian idea continued in its divine incarnation. All institutions worked within hierarchies, with the ruling mechanism legitimized as the representative of God's will. Thomas Aquinas employed the Aristotelian body metaphor within this paradigm, with all

institutions seen as parts of the body of Christ. Within this body, Aquinas made the distinction between the private and public realm. The private realm – always subordinated to the public – was thought of as a forerunner of civil society. Within this medieval logic, the private was the realm of sin as opposed to the divinely inspired public domain.[98]

Using another ahistorical ideology – human nature as nasty and brutish – Thomas Hobbes's fear of social chaos has inspired the more contemporary structural functionalist obsession with social order. To be sure, Hobbes characterized the individual as endowed with certain rights by "natural law." However, all individuals pursuing their own self-interests can potentially lead to "war of all against all," the basic trait of the "state of nature." Entrusting the state with enforcing social order would help humanity move from this state of nature. However, that could be possible only if the state was imbued with enormous power that could overwhelm people. The state as Leviathan, therefore, gained legitimacy not from the spontaneous association of people, but from an external mythical source. This form of state, then, became the Great Definer that could specify reality for people, since individual experiences and the resulting realm of opinions were not to be trusted. The State became the grand hermeneutic, and the rules emanating from the State served to decide what is appropriate in the everyday lives of people.

Following on these ideas, in the theories of Enlightenment thinkers, the "new phenomenon" known as modern capitalist society was characterized in more or less similar fashion, with the difference that the individual was now perceived to be an independent being, free of the primordial and binding ties that were communal in nature. This led Ferdinand Tönnies, much later, to discuss the move from *gemeinshaft*

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[98] Ehrenberg, Civil Society.

(community) to *gesselschaft* (society). In this case, communities are described as having ties that, according to Tönnies, are of a primary nature as opposed to the social relations in *gessellschaft* where people enter and exit relationships voluntarily.[99] The significant factor here is that with the Enlightenment, the individual comes to be seen as the sovereign unit of society, although this trait is more formal than substantive.

This new view of sovereignty is seen clearly in John Locke, who followed Hobbes in theorizing about the state-society relationship. Unlike Hobbes, however, Locke did not see individuals as evil and untrustworthy. But consistent with the main tenet of liberalism, the individual is, instead, sovereign. For Locke, the sovereignty of the individual led to a focus on the ownership of private property, which could subvert the common good. The fundamental question that spurred Locke's thinking was that when the deeply held beliefs of individuals clashed, who will have the authority to judge?[100] With the realization that people could govern themselves only on the basis of trust, Locke proposed that in the new system of liberal democracy people must turn some of their sovereignty on to the state. The state, now the wielder of sovereignty through the social contract, became the defender and perpetuator of the legal framework required for the maintenance of private property. John Dunn points out a crucial contribution by Locke to the emergence of the modern idea of civil society: "[Locke] distinguished sharply between true civil societies in which governmental power derives in more or less determinate ways from the consent of their citizens, and political units which possess at

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[99] Ferdinand Tonnies, <u>Community and Civil Society</u>, (Cambridge, New York: Cambridge University Press 2001).

[100] Sunil Khilnani, "The development of civil society" in Sudipta Kaviraj, Sunil Khilnani <u>Civil Society: History and Possibilities</u>, (Cambridge, New York: Cambridge University Press 2001), Pp. 131-146.

least equivalent concentrations of coercive power but in which there is neither the recognition nor the reality of any dependence of governmental power upon popular consent."[101] Locke, thus, thought of civil society as an aggregate of civilized individuals, well socialized in the ways of modern social existence.

A similar maneuver – of placing the whole, and therefore the source of social order, outside the realm of the collective of individuals – is visible in Kant. If Locke was concerned about governance and the state, Kant employed similar principles in the realm of morality. In his philosophy, the governing ontology is located outside the realm of individual experience. As a result, the former gains enormous power to control the collective life. Kant's idea of the general condition of morality – the Categorical Imperative – means the rules that can be considered legitimately moral must transcend the realm of individual experience. The person, therefore, has to overcome his individual experiences and reach the realm of the general.

In an attempt to level this hierarchy, liberal philosophers such as Rousseau made the distinction between the particular and the general will. According to Rousseau, the particular will (the will of the individuals) was the source of society. However, within the theoretical maneuver that constitutes the collective, he elevated the general will (that represents the realm of the social) to the status of *sui generis*. The general will represented the collective sentiments in society, and thus gained the ability to direct the particular will and replaced the latter as the source of social order. In Rousseau, the general will became synonymous with the state.

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[101] John Dunn, "Trust and Political Agency" in D. Gambetta (ed.), <u>Trust</u>, (Oxford: Blackwell 1988), p. 83.

Hegel has been recognized as the foremost philosopher of civil society, although he privileged the state as an outgrowth of the Absolute Spirit.[102] For Hegel, ethics concerned the ability of human beings to attain freedom through the transition from the immediate to the lofty stages of the universal form.[103] While, traditionally, the relationship between society and the source of social order was thought of in binary terms, Hegel is credited with thinking that society constituted of three distinct spheres – the family (the sphere of particular altruism), civil society (the sphere of universal egoism), and the state (the sphere of universal altruism).[104] According to Khilnani, concerned as he was about creating and sustaining community under modern conditions, Hegel sought to integrate "the individual freedoms specified by the natural law tradition… with a rich vision of community existing under conditions of modern exchange."[105] At this juncture, civil society is the sphere of recognition, of "modern" subjectivity, and not simply instrumentality and the pursuit of individual self-interest. Thus, for Hegel, civil society mediated between the state and the family. The role of the state was not merely to safeguard self-interest, but transcend this motive. And with his emphasis on the state as the highest embodiment of ethical unity, Hegel viewed civil society rather ambiguously.[106] In fact, according to Femia, while Hegel realized that civil

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[102] Shlomo Avineri, Hegel's Theory of the Modern State, (London: Cambridge University Press, 1972).

[103] Joseph Femia, "Civil Society and the Marxist Tradition" in Sudipta Kaviraj and Sunil Khilnani, Civil Society: History and Possibilities, (Cambridge, New York: Cambridge University Press, 2001), pp. 131-146.

[104] G.W.F. Hegel, (Ed. and Trans. by T.M. Knox 1952), The Philosophy of Right, (Oxford: The Clarendon Press 1821).

[105] Khilnani, "The development of civil society", p.23.

[106] Avineri, Hegel's Theory of the Modern State.

society is a requirement for freedom, he also thought that "any society that allowed the forces of civil society to rule unimpeded would destroy itself."[107]

While these philosophers of modernity were keen to establish the new phenomena by invoking ethical ideals to understand the new communal existence, Marx was intent on analyzing not merely the new form characterized by association, but also applied a materialist critique to civil society and its relationship to the state, or politics. Marx believed that it was a characteristic of modern capitalism to conceive of society as having distinct spheres – political, economic, etc. – that are independent.

According to Marx, what Hegel identified as civil society was in fact *burgerlich gessellschaft* (bourgeois society), a precondition for the functioning of modern capitalism, where private property rights are recognized and exchanges of commodities, including labor power, occurs in an unregulated fashion. This maneuver made civil society the real sphere of collective human existence, where the exploitation of labor is possible. On the other hand, the political sphere of the liberal democratic state constituted the interests of the dominant classes in the capitalist society. Hence, Marx calls into question the basic assumptions advanced by modern theorists of civil society – the question of ontological dissimilarity between state and civil society on the one hand, and the assumption regarding the independent individual who partakes in the associational life of civil society.

Marx points out that while the bourgeois revolution that led to the establishment of modern capitalism may have broken the shackles of the precapitalist subjectivities, new subjectivities based on the nature of capitalism have come into existence. Labor, according to Marx, is not a voluntary activity, but at the very core of human life. Through

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[107] Femia, "Civil Society and the Marxist Tradition," p. 135,

labor human beings together produce the very conditions of their existence. Thus, labor defines the species being (*gatungwessen*) of human kind. By submitting labor to the imperative of surplus production and accumulation, the former is tethered to the diktats of capital. In this sense, Marx argues that the freedom of the individual in capitalist societies is only a chimera, an inversion of reality, like a commodity. For Marx, the nature of such subjectivities – social relations – is political. Civil society, by transferring politics to the political sphere of the state, makes invisible this fundamental dimension. Through the formalization of politics, the state gains the upper hand over civil society. Although like his predecessors, Marx recognizes the ontological supremacy of the state over civil society, he does not view the two as unquestionably distinct spheres independent of each other. Nor does he think that such a form of the state is a necessary precondition for the maintenance of social order.

Civil Society, Neoliberalism and Third World:

Despite having a rich history as a key component of modernity, until recently civil society was a rather forgotten idea even within the framework of modernization. For instance, in the discourse of modern development that was advanced in the aftermath of the World War, the state and not civil society was seen as the prime mover of growth and development. The potential of civil society was rediscovered after the concept was invoked by the opponents of the socialist regimes in East Europe during the 1980s and 1990s. Since then, however, civil society has enjoyed the status of a panacea for the many ills faced by several societies – particularly those in the Third World and the Global South – where increasing inequalities threaten to disrupt the social order.

Many critics have pointed out that it is no accident that the rise of civil society is contemporaneous with the global spread of neoliberalism.[108] With the growth of the market and the subsequent change in character of most states – particularly in the pronounced withdrawal from commitment to "social development" and welfare – civil society has been proposed to fill the void in a more efficient manner when compared to state bureaucracy that is often viewed, with some justification, as inept. Implied in such proposals is the traditional opposition between civil society and the state, including the respective signifiers of freedom and coercion.[109] Promoting civil society is thus seen as consistent with the principle of "freedom," although such liberties in the neoliberal context are linked to the market forces and entrepreneurship.[110] Freedom, as a principle, requires democracy to flourish, and civil society is thought to provide such a context.

This trend has led to the development of non-state institutions that enjoy high levels of autonomy, which is consistent with the growth of a market unregulated by state control. Often the state is presented as a site of political manipulation, whereas the market is thought of as objective and free from the encumbrances imposed by politics. In the neoliberal framework, the market is defined as a neutral mechanism that is thought to embody the reason and efficiency, rather than biases and political agendas, necessary to allocate resources in the most efficient manner possible. The market thus claims to represent something universal that transcends cultural and other political and social

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[108] James Petras, The New Development Politics: The Age of Empire Building and New Social Movements, (Burlington, VT: Ashgate 2003).

[109] Jude Howell, Jenny Pearce. Civil Society and Development: A Critical Exploration. (Boulder, Colorado: Lynne Rienner Publishers, Inc., 2001).

[110] James Petras, Henry Veltmeyer. Globalization Unmasked: Imperialism in the 21st Century. (New York: Zed Books 2001).

contingencies. Lately, many critiques of the global market have maintained that this mechanism is political and constraining. Both the market and the state represent abstract universals that have a status *sui generis* and limit civil society. Recent critics of neo-liberal globalization, such as Franz Hinkelammert, have referred to this situation as the "total market" – the market and its values dictate every aspect of social life.[111] In this sense, particularly in its relationship to civil society, the market is not necessarily antagonistic to the state. Instead, this economic regulator represents a new mutation of autonomous control. The critics of globalization say that if civil society is to be seen as something that can overcome these forms of control, then it has to be reconceptualized as an embodiment of people's praxis.

Civil Society in India:

Civil society, like most aspects of modernity, is often defined in contrast to "traditional societies" in the Third World. In the case of India, the introduction of modernity was part of the colonial experience. Accordingly, civil society is contrasted with community, in that the social structures and relations in the two are vastly different from each other – particularly in terms of subjectivity and the nature of association. In communities, identities/subjectivities are often "ascribed" and "primordial," and thus are not volitional identities that are a necessary condition for the free association of people that characterizes civil society.

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[111] Franz J. Hinkelammert (Translated by Phillip Berryman), The Ideological Weapons of Death: A Theological Critique of Capitalism, (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1985).

Chatterjee[112] points out that since civil society emerged as a part of colonial modernity in India, the development of civil society was different from the European experience. While integrating India with the modern capitalist world system, colonialism retained and, in some instances, strengthened the existing feudal social structures. Thus colonial India was a blend of modernity and feudalism, while legitimating traditional power relations and colonial rule.

The colonial experience spawned a group of indigenous elite who were keen to adopt the image of the colonial rulers. Many of them were entrenched in bureaucracy and associated spheres of colonial rule. While mostly from dominant castes, many also had an English education and appropriated the English manners and customs.[113] Moreover, the elite were differentiated from the general "population." The latter lived by "tradition" in communities where caste/gender identities, among others, determined subjectivities – both in terms of world-view and practice. Nonetheless, Chatterjee says certain sections of the colonial elite were the earliest champions of civil society.[114] Since the characteristics of civil society were learned from the colonial rulers, according to Chatterjee, a pedagogical function was associated with civil society in countries like India. In effect, the habits of civil society had to be "learned."

After independence from colonial rule, this form is said to have persisted, albeit in a different way. The state, through its mandate of development, emerged as a crucial entity around which social life revolved. Since the state was the controller of resources,

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[112] Partha Chatterjee, "On civil and political societies in post-colonial democracies" in Sudipta Kaviraj and Sunil Khilnani, Civil Society: History and Possibilities, Cambridge, New York: Cambridge University Press, 2001), pp. 131-146.

[113] Chatterjee, "On civil and political societies in post-colonial democracies."

[114] Ibid.

people formed groups within the "political society" in order to bargain with the state for welfare. According to Chatterjee, the associational life of political society is characterized by dependencies of various sorts, particularly the state. He contrasts this situation with the associations in civil society of the elites. Such a characterization is very similar to the one between "masses" and "classes." Many theorists of civil society propose its existence as a precondition for a well functioning political democracy. Based on this idea, many NGOs, aid agencies and developmental groups arrogate to themselves the pedagogical task of developing civil society and bringing people into the "mainstream." Such attempts, often presented in an "apolitical" fashion, are oblivious to the obvious politics that undergirds these social relations that they seek to alter. Civil society has now come to signify a democratized society without specifying the power that runs through social relations.[115]

As Alvin Gouldner points out, it is important to identify and analyze the social structures of civil society.[116] Kumar points out that the recent attempts to revive the classical liberal notions, in the absence of analysis of such social structures and relations, have only added to the conceptual confusion surrounding civil society. According to Kumar, often the calls for expanding civil society and contracting the state are made in place of calls for more substantial democratization.[117] In the absence of any concrete analysis of the internal divisions of civil society, the tendency of classes to accumulate power, and proposals to address any resulting problems, civil society will always remain

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[115] Krishan Kumar, "Civil Society: An Inquiry into the Usefulness of an Historical Term", The British Journal of Sociology, (1993 Vol. 44, No. 3. (Sep.)), pp.375-395.

[116] Cited in Kumar, "Civil Society: An Inquiry into the Usefulness of an Historical Term."

[117] Ibid.

an unstable sphere that requires a more powerful state to manage social affairs. Kumar suggests that politics should precede civil society in democracy. Therefore, there is a need to analyze the social structures of civil society, while emphasizing to the political. Such an effort may present a new image of social structures in the spirit of deep democracy.

Civil Society in Gramsci: Ideology, Hegemony, and War of Position

While Marx and the "classical" Marxists were criticized for being "economic determinists," at the cost of ignoring the other dimensions of civil society, Antonio Gramsci provided an elaborate theory of civil society that moves away from the "base-superstructure" divide.[118] Gramsci's concept of civil society is linked intrinsically to another concept that he is credited with clarifying – hegemony.[119] It is clear from Gramsci's writings that, like Marx, he equates civil society with politics, where legitimization of the ruling economic and political arrangements is sought and contested. However, moving away from the strict separation of the two spheres – the economic (production) and political (reproduction) – that classical Marxists attributed to Marx, Gramsci thought of civil society in active terms. In Gramsci, civil society is where the "active-hegemony" of the dominant classes is established and where the forces of civil

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[118] Norberto Bobbio, "Gramsci and the conception of civil society" in Chantal Mouffe (Ed.), <u>Gramsci and Marxist Theory</u>, (London, Boston: Routledge and Kegan Paul 1979). See also Chantal Mouffe, "Hegemony and Ideology in Gramsci" in the same book.

[119] Antonio Gramsci, (Ed. and translated by Quintin Hoare and Geoffrey Nowell Smith), <u>Selections from the Prison Notebooks of Antonio Gramsci</u>, (New York: International Publishers 1971).

society – particularly the dominated classes – resist hegemonization through what he calls the 'war of position'.[120]

Gramsci adopts Marx's crucial point of departure from the classical liberal tradition. While the latter tends to present civil society and the state as distinct and independent, in Marx and, more clearly, Gramsci the two are organically linked together through hegemony.[121] Civil society is the thus site of hegemony and contention. As Buttigieg argues: "Gramsci regarded civil society as an integral part of the state; in his view, civil society, far from inimical to the state, was, in fact, its most resilient and constitutive element, even though the most immediate visible aspect of the state is the political society, with which it is all to often mistakenly identified."[122] According to Gramsci, civil society is where the dominant historical bloc, or "class," seeks to legitimate its economic dominance. This historical bloc, however, is not merely an 'economic' function, but combines dominance in both civil society and the economy – both in the production processes and through ideology. Gramsci thought of ideology as the cement that holds together a historical bloc.

According to Gramsci, the hegemony of the dominant classes is exercised to achieve economic domination in the social and political spheres. In essence, the dominated classes adopt the ideology of the dominant classes through consent rather than direct coercion. Larrain points out the basis of this understanding in Gramsci: "Although force is the last argument in society, through ideology men submit freely to the social

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[120] Ibid.

[121] Kumar, "Civil Society: An Inquiry into the Usefulness of an Historical Term."

[122] John A. Buttigieg, "Gramsci on Civil Society" in boundary 2, (1995. 22:3 (Autumn)), pp. 1-32.

system without a permanent need for the use of force."[123] This complex processes is not a fixed event or a distinctly discernible process. Instead, the production of hegemony is an ongoing process through which the *status quo* is legitimated on an everyday basis. However, hegemony is never complete. According to Gramsci, hegemonic formation does not occur simply through some sort of structural evolution. On the contrary, he uses the concept "active-hegemony" to describe how hegemonic structures are put in place through the intervention of interested classes.

Given that civil society is the site where the dominant classes seek to establish their hegemony, the rejection of the dominant classes originates from this site. Gramsci calls the counter hegemonic efforts of dominated class the "war of position." This war is a slow and arduous process of ideological articulation and construction by the dominated classes to forge ideological alliances with other classes within civil society. In the course of the "war of position," the ideology of the dominant classes unravels, particularly the "common sense" that is purported to be universal, along with the power that enforces this viewpoint. Simultaneously, the dominated classes make an effort to construct ideological unity through dialogic discourse and collective praxis.[124] This process is long and arduous, because the dominated classes have to work within the civil society normally dominated by the dominant classes.

What is important to understand is that unlike "false consciousness," as commonly understood in classical Marxism, ideology does not have a necessarily

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[123] Jorge Larrain, The Concept of Ideology. (Athens, Georgia: The University of Georgia Press, 1979), pp. 79-80.

[124] Ernesto Laclau, Chantal Mouffe, Hegemony and Socialist Strategy: Towards a Radical Democratic Politics. (London: Verso, 1985).

pejorative connotation in Gramsci. Ideology is understood as a world-view that informs people's practice, and in turn is shaped and consolidated through such activity. Thus, ideology, in Gramsci, is the key to preserving the unity of a historical bloc.[125] This conception of ideology seeks to overcome the dualistic assumption often made in Western philosophy between thought and action, consciousness and objective reality. Instead, the assumption is that these binaries are in fact strung together in practice, where consciousness and reality are not external to each other, but instead are moments in their unifying practice. Thus, Gramsci points out, ideology is used "in its highest sense of a conception of the world."[126] Gramsci, however, makes a distinction between ideology of the dominant classes and the "philosophy of praxis." The former attempts to conciliate opposite interests – "all hitherto existing philosophies … have been manifestations of the intimate contradictions by which society is lacerated"[127] – whereas the latter illustrates the existing contradictions in society.

Coming back to the question of civil society, unlike the classical liberal tradition, Gramsci does not think of the state as the source of social order and civil society as the sphere of freedom. Thus Buttigieg points out: "… for Gramsci, civil society is best described not as a sphere of freedom but of hegemony."[128] Therefore, the assumption of individuals existing as independent entities, in an *a priori* fashion, that the liberal philosophers have adopted is not valid. Instead, individuals exist in social relations that are characterized by subjectivities. Nonetheless, power is a crucial dynamic that informs

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[125] Larrain. The Concept of Ideology.

[126] Gramsci, Prison Note Books, p. 376.

[127] Ibid. p. 401

[128] Buttigieg, "Gramsci on Civil Society," p. 6-7

these subjectivities that are routinized through hegemony. A counter-hegemonic social movement, then, unravels the power hidden in subjectivities, through praxis.

Towards a Framework to Guide Analysis

What is evident from the above discussion is that civil society, within the mainstream Western intellectual tradition, is often understood in structural terms, which ties the concept to a metaphysic, such as the state, or market, that is considered the universal and the source of social order. While it is often claimed that 'differentiation' is the most important trait of the civil society emerging in modernism, the principles of differentiation, in the form of class, race, gender or other forms of identity and their political nature, are not discussed in mainstream renditions of civil society. Instead, civil society is often presented as a likeable realm, indicative of modernity, that all societies should aspire to create. Hence the populations of the third world are exhorted to "learn" the ways of civil society.

On the contrary, the Gramscian and other recent renditions of civil society reveal these hierarchies and their political intent, in order to develop a democratic and participatory civil society. But such a civil society will have to be built on articulation, recognition, and the negotiation of differences. In a nutshell, in such a civil society, politics is not the "subconscious" of a society, but conscious part of collective action. On these lines, Murphy discusses the new views of civil society from Latin America.[129] Among the new experiments with civil society in Latin America, a common factor is that

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[129] John W. Murphy, "A New View of Civil Society from Latin America," (Unpublished manuscript).

civil society "does not represent a minor component of an overriding system."[130] In emphasizing the importance of grass roots organizing, politics begins with people, and therefore individuals have the ability to rethink the nature and scope of politics. Clearly, this vision is not dualist with a preexisting realm of politics joined by the people who, as citizens, have to partake in politics. Instead, anyone is considered to be a political animal, and politics is the effort and ability to influence the collective destiny of people in societies. Given this shift in thinking, the established institutions of power and politics provide only a "perspective," rather than a universal and inevitable outlook. This view of politics as everyday and ordinary activity means that engaged people do not seek power or desire to be part of the "elite." Instead, they are proposing a new image of social order.

A social movement, particularly given the claims of NSM theorists, provides such an opportunity. Therefore, this analysis rejects the "classical" position that movements are irrational, or fleeting phenomena based on structural strain. While acknowledging that social movements invariably interface with the established structures of politics and power, the neo-institutional assumption that all social movements represent people who have been left out of the political establishment is equally fatuous. And while resources and the nature of organization are important to a social movement, the former should not to be understood in a dualist and realist fashion. Instead, resources and organization are generated through the collective *praxis* of a movement's participants.

Participatory collective action and reflexivity are thought to be important dimensions of democratically oriented anti-hegemonic collective action. According to Murphy, reflexivity is "the activity that is thought to prevent institutions from becoming

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[130] Ibid. p.10

autonomous and havens for claims about supremacy or other privileges."[131] This position also rejects the "dominant institutional modes of rationality, without condemning a society to disorder."[132] The crucial idea here is that individuals and groups, acting together, can engage in collective self-interrogation. Articulation, in the midst of practice, is the way to construct, through collective action, a new social reality. Instead of denying the reality of established modes of power and institutions in society, this understanding denies their autonomy and treats them as mediated through human *praxis*. Hence social reality, while sometimes appearing to be autonomous, is not really externality to *praxis*. Instead, these institutions that represent the particular (not an external universality) can be transformed through collective action, without letting society descend into chaos and disorder. These are some of the guiding assumptions of the analysis of the social movement under consideration.

As mentioned above, participation and reflexivity are crucial to democratizing societies. Here democracy is not understood as imposition "from above" through the institutions of formal democracy. The question is whether, in a liberal democracy like India, civil society and social movements can advance democratization and social justice? The effort will be to interrogate how the agents of civil society interacted with the participants of the movement. By unraveling these forms of interaction, the analysis will attempt to understand the world-view (ideology) that guided the actions of civil society as this sphere became part of the Plachimada movement. This world-view can be arrived at through a critical analysis of particular forms of interaction and practice regarding the

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[131] John W. Murphy, "The New Social Movements and the Rejection of Power," (Unpublished manuscript) p. 11.

[132] Ibid.

nature of organization, the generation of resources, decision-making, leadership, etc. Subjecting these elements to scrutiny will contribute to understanding the democratic potential of civil society and the social movements that are linked to this domain.

CHAPTER 3

Constitution of the Hegemonic Social Order: Colonialism, Development, and Globalization in India

Social movements are organized manifestations of people's struggles to address particular social problems that they face collectively. In the case of the Plachimada movement, the particular social problem was the pollution of ground water that led to a scarcity of potable water. This issue, in turn, produced a crisis of existence for a community of predominantly poor and marginalized tribal people. In fact, this social problem is connected to a more general problem concerning structural inequalities in India, and the experience of marginalization and oppression of tribal and other communities.

In order to understand the nature and goals of the struggle of the people of Plachimada, the reader must consider the social formation within which their poverty and marginality has been produced and perpetuated. At this juncture, the term social formation is used to refer to not "society" in the abstract, but the concrete political economic, cultural, and discursive processes through which a society comes into existence. In seeking to situate the Plachimada social movement as part of a response of the people against their marginality, these persons should be located within the specific social formation and the accompanying processes that are producing social inequalities. Such inequalities are generated and sustained over long periods of time by putting in place a hegemonic social order. A crucial characteristic of this hegemonic social order is its relationship to imperialism. While colonialism brought India into an imperialist relationship with the metropolitan "center" of global capitalism, such relationships

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persisted even after decolonization.[133] To be sure, the purpose of sketching the relationship between the hegemonic social order in India and imperialism is not to blame all the ills on imperialism that are present in the societies under consideration. Instead, the attempt will be to understand the processes whereby the dominant actors align themselves with the global order, thereby fundamentally transforming everyone. While this hegemonic order may change over time, as a result of collective social action from both the dominant and dominated classes, the point is that the general characteristics have remained.

This chapter, then, will attempt to situate the Plachimada movement within the larger "social" processes in India, which themselves have been influenced by external factors since colonialism and up to the recent globalization of neoliberal practices. Indian society cannot thus be discussed without reference to the larger processes through which particular forms of social relations have been constructed, the least of which is the global spread of neoliberal capitalism.[134] Therefore, effort will be made to understand the specifics – the agents and their discourses and practices – of the construction of this hegemonic social order that emerged through the experience of colonialism, including experiments with development and modernization within the framework of a liberal democracy in the post-colonial phase and neoliberal doctrines on a global scale. In other words, this chapter discusses the production of the subjectivities that the social movement in Plachimada sought to leave behind.

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[133] Samir Amin, Unequal Development: An Essay on the Social Formations of Peripheral Capitalism, (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1976). Also see Amiya Kumar Bagchi, The Political Economy of Underdevelopment, (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1990).

[134] Slater makes a similar point about Latin America in David Slater, "New Social Movements and Old Political Questions: Rethinking State-Society Relations in Latin American Development."

Throughout colonialism and the post-colonial period, the state has played a critical role in directing social processes. Since in the post-war era, a specific form of liberal democratic state came to dominate the nation (such as development), as well as business with other nations – i.e. international processes.[135] However, what is important to remember is that the state draws its powers from dominant classes (its social base) within a particular "social formation,"[136] and the latter in turn rely on the state, through a complex web of processes, to advance their interests.[137] The characteristics of the hegemonic social order will be mapped through an examination of the relationship between the state and society, and the particular ways in which groups/classes within society exercise power through/outside of the state.

The main thrust is to show that the marginalization of the local people is not an accident of history, but a part of production and maintenance of domination within the given social formation. In the following section, the emergence of what has been referred to as "developmentalism,"[138] equating development with modernization, will be discussed. And the third section will take a step back and identify the social structures that emerged during British colonialism in India, so that the nature of social changes in the post-colonial stage and the continuities inherent therein can be understood. The

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[135] Ashis Nandy, "State" in Wolfgang Sachs (Ed.) The Development Dictionary: A Guide to Knowledge as Power, (London and New Jersey: Zed Books, 1993).

[136] The term social formation is used to emphasize that a 'society' at any given point in time is produced by the agency of people, whose actions gain meaning within the emergent power relations.

[137] This is not to imply simple instrumentalism. See, Nicos Ar. Poulantzas (Translation editor Timothy O'Hagan), Political Power and Social Classes, (London: Verso, 1978); See also, Leo Panitch, "Globalization and the State" in Leo Panitch, Colin Leys, Alan Zuege and Martijn Konings (Eds.), The Globalization Decade: A Critical Reader. (London: The Merlin Press, 2004).

[138] Philip McMichael, "Globalization: Myths and Realities" in J. Timmons Roberts and Amy Bellone Hite, The Globalization and Development Reader: Perspectives on Development and Global Change, (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 2007).

emphasis in the subsequent (or fourth) section that discusses post-colonial India is on the nature of development (modernization) policies pursued by the state, which, on the one hand, consolidated the power of the dominant classes and, on the other, linked India to developmentalism and global capital. The fifth section will address the Indian condition within the current climate of globalization and neoliberalism.

Within India, Kerala, including Plachimada, pursued a rather different trajectory that emphasized "social development," which managed to produce significant advancement in human development indicators. Some of the successes and failures of the "Kerala model of development" will be discussed in the sixth section, to be followed by a section that will discuss the marginalization of the tribal communities within the Kerala's developmental experience. The concluding section of this chapter will summarize the discussions in the earlier sections, and identify the concrete processes through which the hegemonic social order is perpetuated. The marginality of the people of Plachimada will be situated within this final part.

Development as Modernization

Widely acknowledged is that the anti-colonial movement against Britain up to the first half of the 20th century mobilized all sections of Indian society under the leadership of the dominant classes – the landlords in rural areas and the nascent group of native capitalists that consisted of merchants and industrialists in cities.[139] The prospect of independence from Britain held the promise of a better quality of life for most people,

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[139] Partha Chatterjee, "Development Planning and the Indian State" in Terence J. Byres (Ed.), The State, Development Planning and Liberalization in India, (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1997); Bagchi, The Political Economy of Underdevelopment.

because colonialism, with its extraction of surplus from India, was seen as the main hindrance to "national development." With independence from Britain, such a hindrance would be removed and developing India would rest with the people of India. As a result, even before formal decolonization, the discourse of development had become rather omnipresent in the main vehicle of the anti-colonial movement in India – the Indian National Congress (INC).[140]

In the post-colonial phase, development became the burden of the state. As Chatterjee points out, "It was in the universal function of 'development' of national society as a whole that the post-colonial state would find its distinctive content."[141] National development, according to India's first Prime Minster Jawaharlal Nehru, who was its moving force, was to be undertaken through the "apolitical" process of planning, in a "spirit of cooperation."[142] However, despite the insistence on the apolitical nature of development, in practice the state-led development became a centralized process through the expansion of heavy industries along capitalist lines. Hence, even before formal independence from colonial rule, the almost official policy became that the state "… cannot ignore the question of establishing and encouraging large-scale industries. There can be no planning if such planning does not include big industries…"[143] Development planning after independence became the responsibility of the National Planning Commission (NPC) – a body of experts that was assumed to be apolitical, in so

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[140] Terence J. Byres, "State, Class and Development Planning in India" in Terence J. Byres (Ed.), <u>The State, Development Planning and Liberalization in India</u>, (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1997).

[141] Chatterjee, "Development Planning and the Indian State."

[142] Ibid.

[143] Quote from Nehru's speech cited in Chatterjee, "Development Planning and the Indian State", p. 85.

far as they employed "rationality" in advancing the "science" of planning.[144] The effect of such an exercise was thought to be the modernization of India that would be achieved through the implementation of policy prescriptions presented by the above mentioned elite body. The implementation was in the form of Five Year Plans (FYPs) that were undertaken mostly through the structures of the state – primarily, the bureaucracy.

This view of development as modernization had many advocates both inside and outside India and the Third World. The end of the Second World War saw the decline of the British and French Empires, due to anti-colonial movements, and the emergence of the USA as the leader of the capitalist bloc. As Esteva points out,[145] Truman, while taking office as President of the USA in 1949, declared a new vision of the world: the countries of the Southern hemisphere that were newly emerging from colonialism were characterized as "underdeveloped" and thus required assistance for development. In what was presented as a bold move away from "old imperialism," assistance for development was to be in the form of sharing with them the benefits of technological advancement and scientific progress in the West. In short, the assumption was that the underdeveloped world would be helped on the way of modernization through development assistance.

Alvin So points out that evolutionary theory and functionalism form the ideological basis of the modernization school that emerged as dominant in the West. [146] Evolutionary theory assumed that social change occurs by a society moving from

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[144] James Ferguson, <u>The Anti-Politics Machine: "Development," Depoliticization and Bureaucratic Power in Lesotho</u>, (Minneapolis, London: University of Minnesota Press, 1994).

[145] Gustavo Esteva, "Development," Wolfgang Sachs (Ed.), <u>The Development Dictionary: A Guide to Knowledge as Power</u>, (London and New Jersey: Zed Books, 1993).

[146] Alvin So, <u>Social Change and Development: Modernization, Dependency, and World-System Theories</u>, (Newbury Park, California: Sage Publications, 1990).

primitive to more advanced stages. This unidirectional development of societies represented their progress toward a higher stage of civilization. Such development, within a largely ahistorical and structurally deterministic view of societies, was thought to go through gradual processes of cumulative advancement.[147] The greatest exemplar of such an outlook is functionalist theory. According to Parsons, a society is like an organism where all of the parts work in an interrelated fashion and conflict-free fashion; as in a human body, the functions performed by each part contribute to the whole of the society. Therefore, every society constantly attempts to attain a stage of equilibrium, which means that a change in one social component will bring about changes in other parts.

Theories about modernity often took the form of a binary between tradition and modernity. Since the West assumed the lead in academic production, as in other spheres, often these formulations that were produced in the West eventually became policy directives for the recently decolonized Third World countries. One such example is in the distinctions early sociologists made between traditional and modern societies: modern societies were thought to be characterized by a high level of structural differentiation when compared to traditional ones. A key way of differentiating structurally is the extent to which tools and inanimate sources of power are utilized. The implication is that the modern societies used "higher" and more sophisticated tools and sources of power, and therefore represent progress with respect to traditional societies.[148] Such formulations were extended to suggest that once traditional societies came in contact with modern ones, the process of modernization would begin in the former. In this light, modernization has been thought of as a progressive and irreversible, although lengthy, homogenizing

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[147] Ibid. p. 19

[148] Discussed in So, Social Change and Development.

process that works in a phased manner. Also assumed is that being a systematic progress, and large-scale in scope, modernization transforms all sectors of society. Once modernization processes are put in place, they bring about change in all social spheres in a slow and evolutionary fashion.[149]

Accordingly, the economist Rostow[150] identified five stages of social change in a Third World country: traditional society, precondition for take-off, take-off, the drive to maturity, and maturity and high mass-consumption society. Every Third World country, in its initial stage, is traditional. Then, in the next phase that Rostow calls preconditions for take-off, the country starts to see the emergence of entrepreneurs, markets, and industrialization. A stimulus – in the form of political revolution, technological change, or a helpful international climate – may propel a society forward from the precondition to the take-off stage.

Rostow[151] stipulates that at this stage the rate of productive investment (in the form of capital and other resources) should be raised to 10 percent of the national income. Rostow lists a variety of possible sources that may provide the necessary productive investment. The sources could range from (1) the income of the state through taxation or confiscation of private property, (2) banks and capital markets, (3) foreign trade or (4) foreign capital investment. And once economic growth is set in motion, and is well entrenched in society, the subsequent stages will follow. However, in the case of Third World countries, as is historically documented, the significant source of investment that

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[149] Ibid.

[150] W.W. Rostow, "The Takeoff Into Self-Sustained Growth" in Amitai Etzioni and Eva Etzioni (eds.) Social Change, (New York: Basic Books, 1964), pp. 285-300.

[151] Ibid.

came to determine their course of development was foreign capital investment, particularly in the form of "foreign aid" that included capital, technology, and expertise.

From this above description of the modernization school, these renditions of development and social change make no reference to concrete social relations or power. More specifically, there is no identification and discussion of social classes – both internal and external to these social formations – and their contention for power, the ensuing conflict, and the social change produced by these factors. In the absence of these, the model is largely a prescription that universalizes a historically specific form of capitalist development experienced by societies in Western Europe and North America. Furthermore, a phased development of society gives the impression that societies undergo structural development devoid of any exercise of agency on the part of people.

Remarkably, however, the ruling elite of India after independence were happy to embrace this school of development, despite the problems it presented particularly in a post-colonial context. After all, the imperative was to develop in the image of the colonizer who represented modernity. Thus, the new hegemonic discourse of development, known as modernization, was foisted on Indian society. The fallout from this was that, as shall be seen in the discussion below, the majority of people in India did not play any role in deciding the kind of development they wanted.

At this stage, certain questions should be asked about the historically specific form of Indian society that emerged from the subjugation by the British. Such an inquiry needs to look at society not as existing in equilibrium, whereby change in one sector brings about unproblematic and unquestioned change in others. Instead, most important is to look at the concrete changes and conflicts that are produced. The following sections

examine the social structures in colonial India, and the changes and continuities associated with these in the post-colonial phase.

Social Structures of Colonial India

A brief consideration of the colonial time period is necessary, because during colonialism India was integrated into the newly emerging global capitalist system through the processes of imperialism.[152] Imperialist capital entered a social formation that was largely "feudal" in characteristics. In other words, the vast majority of the people of India lived in rural areas where agriculture was the predominant mode of production. The agrarian economy worked within a feudal system where caste played a crucial role in determining the ownership of land – the upper castes were mostly owners of land, whereas some of the lower castes were, within a cosmology supported by religious strictures, barred from such ownership.

The power of the landlords stemmed from "extra-economic" factors, such as religious cosmology that propped up the caste system. While caste could not be reduced to mere "economic" logic, class polarization – based on land holdings – was largely predicated on the lines of caste. The class pattern in most villages consisted of a few landlords and middle peasants (depending on the amount of land owned), with most of the people being small peasants, who held minimum land that barely enabled them produce for their subsistence, and landless laborers.[153] Class distinctions largely

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[152] Andre Gunder Frank, Dependent Accumulation and Underdevelopment, (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1979); Bagchi, The Political Economy of Underdevelopment; Ronald H Chilcote, The Political Economy of Imperialism: Critical Appraisals, (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield Publishers, 2000).

[153] Bagchi, The Political Economy of Underdevelopment.

correlated with caste hierarchies. The feudal structure that was consolidated in Colonial

India also saw the institutionalization of various new hierarchies, represented by rent and

tax collectors, that further aided the extraction and appropriation of surplus produce

through various forms of coercion. Because of the extra-economic nature of social power

and the absence of a capitalist market, there was no imperative for the landlords to

reinvest the extracted surplus to increase production. In a nutshell, the feudal condition

imposed severe limits on the capabilities of people, apart from leaving them in poverty

and dependent on landlords for employment.

With colonization, India was integrated into the world capitalist system, albeit in a

disadvantaged position.[154] The entry of capital into India was qualitatively different from

the growth of capitalism in England. In England, the emergence of capitalism had

overthrown the manorial system that shackled people to the land. For instance, Marx

argued that the emergence of capitalism in England overhauled the existing mode of

production and social relations, and as a result the manorial system gave way to

mercantile capitalism and further to industrial capitalism, while releasing the productive

forces, or the laborers, from feudal bondage.[155] According to Marx, capitalism ensured

initially the socialization of production processes, whereby labor ceased to be a private

activity on farm or by artisans; instead, labor became a social process that lead to the

extraction of "absolute surplus" by lengthening the working day. The second stage of

capitalism in England was represented by technological advancements that aided the

reduction of the average social time required for the production of commodities, thus

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[154] Ibid.

[155] Karl Marx in Robert C. Tucker, (Ed.), The Marx-Engels Reader. (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1978).

increasing the extraction of "relative surplus."[156] These two processes, according to Marx, affected society to the extent that the people were now free of feudal bondage.[157]

On the contrary, as a colony of Britain, India was used as a captive market for the extraction of raw materials and other economic surplus. This process brought about a "dependent" entry into the global capitalism with the result that economic growth did not bring about much positive change in the existing social relations in India. On the contrary, it has been argued, the existing structures of power in the feudal system got strengthened.

Frank and others have pointed out that imperialist capital was deployed in colonies to aid the development of capitalism in the metropolitan center (the colonizer).[158] As Rao says,[159]

> the entry of imperialism produces capitalism in the native economy which is an extension of the imperialist economy and helpful in terms of surplus extraction and which also generates a set of interests in the economy which combine the pre-capitalist modes of exploitation with the newly learned capitalist modes. In the whole process, the two systems are allowed to coexist with all their contradictions.

Clearly, while extraction of surplus was the prime aim of colonialism in India, feudal social relations were left in tact. Colonialism retained and even strengthened the existing feudal apparatus, thereby using the latter to further extract surplus produce. As Frank points out, the underdevelopment of colonized countries was a necessary condition for the development of metropolitan capitalism. An important aspect of imperialism in

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[156] Ibid.

[157] Ibid.

[158] Frank, Dependent Accumulation and Underdevelopment.

[159] R.S. Rao, Towards Understanding Semi Feudal Semi Colonial Society: Studies in Political Economy, (Hyderabad: Perspectives, 1995), p.87.

the colonies was the appropriation of natural resources and agrarian produce, such as cotton, and the production and maintenance of a captive market for the commodities produced in the metropolitan center. Amiya Bagchi[160] sums up the process of underdevelopment in the colonies, as part of imperialism, in *The Political Economy of Underdevelopment*:

> "Rulers took away a part of the product in the form of tribute, for which, of course, no payment was made; then merchants and chartered monopolies bought up products from peasants and artisans at prices which were absurdly low by internal and international standards, and various coercive devices and closing of alternative markets kept these prices low; planters and mine-owners employed the local population and imported labour as slaves, serfs or other kinds of unfree labour, at wages which were often insufficient even to allow the workers to survive and reproduce themselves. The products of these mines and plantations then went directly or indirectly to service the growing capitalism of Western Europe. These modes of extraction of a surplus in the colonies and other countries of the third world survived long after industrial capitalism had grown to maturity in western Europe and North America."

This change meant that the dominant classes in India during colonialism were metropolitan capitalists, rural landlords, and a small class of nascent domestic capitalists, while the masses remained poor peasants or landless laborers. The lack of industrialization meant that the industrial working class was very limited in India. The British had also put in place an administrative structure in India that spawned a new class – a native elite that became part of the colonial bureaucracy. These Indians were trained and put in charge of the lower rungs of the administrative machinery, while the the upper echelons of the state were controlled by the British. After formal independence, while India became a sovereign nation, many of the structures bequeathed to India by the British remained. The most important of these was the bureaucracy, or the Indian

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[160] Bagchi, <u>The Political Economy of Underdevelopment</u>. p. 14

Administrative Service, which was put in place by the British by recruiting people from the dominant feudal classes. In a sense, the Indian state bureaucracy was an imperialist product with a feudal character.

Social Structures of Post Colonial India

The anti-colonial movement mobilized vast sections of Indian society under the leadership of the landlords and the nascent domestic capitalists. Independence from colonial rule offered the poor peasantry the promise of substantial social changes that would lead to an overall improvement in quality of life. During the anti-colonial movement, the idea widely propagated was that with the British being driven away from India, the Indians could decide on their own destiny. The end of the British rule, and the starting of "self-rule" by Indians, provided such an opportunity. Fulfilling such a promise would have meant people taking hold of the processes of development, and imposing their collective requirements in the context of the resources that are locally available. While people looked on the new state as the vehicle of change, the latter, in turn, quickly identified itself with "developmentalism."

However, the exercise of people's collective agency required a large scale transformation of the existing social arrangement of feudalism, which itself was intensified during the colonial experience. Because land is the primary means of production in agrarian societies with feudal characteristics, ownership became a function of social power. As mentioned above, the land owners in India enjoyed feudal power at the cost of the real producers – the poor peasants and agrarian laborers –who continued to till the land. Reforming the laws relating to land holding, and organizing a drive to

redistribute land to the original producers, would have resulted in the large scale mobilization and empowerment of the oppressed classes in India, thereby drastically changing the social relations in the countryside. The fact that the actual redistribution of land to the producers did not happen in most parts of India is attributed to the influence that the feudal landlords exerted on the developmentalist state.[161]

The alliance of the dominant classes that constituted the State is crucial to understanding the trajectory of development in post-colonial India. The two major sites of the economy were the agrarian and industrial sectors, with the state bureaucracy forming a third power base. Feudal landlords emerged as a powerful class in the agrarian sector, whose interests were well represented in the State through the political leadership and bureaucracy. In the cities were a group of domestic capitalists who had emerged during colonial times. Although they were small and nascent, they wielded enough power to influence the course of development in India.[162] Apart from these, foreign capital continued to exert influence despite the formal end of colonialism.

Regarding the class alliances toward the end of British rule in India, Mike Mason points out that "even by 1939 British and Indian capitalists had put competition behind them and were hunting for profits as partners rather than rivals. Thus, from the viewpoint of British capitalism in India, independence was not an especially fearful prospect."[163] This trend meant that "In the early years after independence foreign capital occupied a

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[161] Rao, Towards Understanding Semi Feudal Semi Colonial Society.

[162] Terence J. Byres, "Introduction: The Major Debates on the Indian Economy Since Independence: Boundaries, Context and Content" in Terence J. Byres (Ed.), The Indian Economy: Major Debates Since Independence, (Oxford, New York: Oxford University Press, 1998).

[163] Mike Mason, Development and Disorder: A History of the Third World since 1945, (Toronto, CA: Between The Lines, 1997), p. 268.

large place in the Indian economy, with most of this capital coming from the profits of previous investment."[164] Although the domestic capitalists enjoyed protected markets in the interim, foreign capital became an even stronger presence in the subsequent years.

During colonial times, the feudal social structure and production systems were integrated with imperialist capitalism, and this confluence further strengthened the power of the landlords, both in the economic and cultural spheres.[165] The power of the landlords in the state and society meant that the redistribution of land, particularly to the tillers, was effectively scuttled. While the State eventually enacted land reform laws despite several delays, the policy of land redistribution was not implemented in practice in most states. This shortcoming had large scale ramifications for the nature of development in general, and rural societies in particular, some of which will be discussed below.

As mentioned above, development was to be the growth of domestic capitalism, particularly through industrialization aided by state expenditure. Given the experience of imperialism, the state was expected to direct development in a manner that helped domestic capitalism gain a level of autonomy, thus breaking the umbilical chord with imperialism. This shift meant two things: one, the state had to be the main investor in capitalist enterprises, particularly in the productive sector such as heavy industry, and two, the nascent group of domestic capitalists, who had emerged during colonial times, had to be provided with state patronage and protected markets.

The expectation was that, as was the case of Western European countries, the emergence of a domestic capitalist class would further social change, break down feudalism, and release the productive forces in society. The pursuit of capitalist

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[164] Ibid.

[165] Rao, Towards Understanding Semi-Feudal Semi-Colonial Society.

development, particularly in the form of state capitalism, meant that development occurred through practices "from above," as prescribed by the central body of experts – the National Planning Commission (NPC) that claimed to pursue planning as a science.[166] Despite claims to being apolitical, as mentioned above, clearly the interests of powerful classes influenced, if not dominated, what was initially assumed to be a rational exercise.

However, there was also a crucial question of the new post-colonial state gaining legitimacy among the people. With development as the prime aim, legitimization was derived from successful state projects. While in practice development was along capitalist lines, the rhetoric presented for public consumption identified planning as "socialist" and for the "welfare" of the people. This rhetoric was legitimated through India positioning itself as a champion of non-alignment during the Cold War, while undertaking planned development and borrowing the idea of five year plans from the Soviet Union.

Capitalist development was to be measured in terms of economic growth. Instead of seeking to increase production, the dominant classes depended on the state for the accumulation of surplus. While production increased, this change did not alter appreciably the nature of oppressive social relations. According to Bagchi, "Even when native capitalists succeeded Europeans in the third world countries, many of [the colonial] methods of extraction of surplus from peasantry and semi-free labour were kept alive, at the same time as a capacity was being built up in modern, mechanized industries."[167]

Continuous expansion of investments by the state – particularly in heavy industries – was thought to be the route to ensuring growth. During the period between

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[166] Chatterjee, "Development Planning and the Indian State."

[167] Bagchi, The Political Economy of Underdevelopment, p. 15

1955 and 1965 (the terms of the second and third Five Year Plan (FYP)), there was a clear shift towards "productive investment" in the capital goods sector. At the same time, the expectation was that domestic private capitalist investment would take care of growth with respect to consumption goods. The justification for such a policy was that industrialization would lead to an increase in economic growth, which in turn would lead to a decrease in unemployment rates over time, and, thereby, a reduction in poverty. However, the agrarian sector was largely ignored, with a shift in policy toward to the industrial sector. Further, the continuation of feudal social relations in rural areas, along with stagnant productivity, and a concentration of surplus in the hands of the landlords, meant that poverty and unemployment would rise. The stagnation in agriculture was manifest in an increasing army of landless laborers and poor peasants, who were barely surviving on subsistence farming. These two classes, who often belonged to the lowest castes, were left unable to participate in the national economic growth.

The stagnation in agriculture was manifested eventually in a terrible crisis in the mid-60s: India had to import food, due to two years of crop failure that lead to food shortages across the country. This agrarian crisis had a further negative effect on the overall economic situation in the country. Instead of reforming the feudal system through a redistribution of land, which was concentrated mostly in the hands of a few landlords, the State sought to address the agrarian problem through modernization, i.e. technological intervention.

In what has come to be known as the "Green Revolution," technological advancements made largely in the West – new crops, advanced fertilizers, various agricultural equipments – were provided to the big farmers through state subsidies. The

state also intervened actively to maintain rather profitable prices, so that productivity was kept at high levels. While such policies improved the overall food situation, by concentrating the results of the agrarian growth in the hands of the few, the green revolution further exacerbated the dire condition of the poor peasants and agrarian laborers.[168] Over the years, the overall situation was becoming clear: in the hierarchy of labor in particular, and social relations in general, agrarian labor ranked the lowest.

However, the state, in a bid to retain its legitimacy among people, regularly initiated the popular discourse of taking care of the poor and empowering the marginalized sectors. Such claims were corroborated with statistics related to a decline in the rates of absolute poverty until the 1980s. However, Frances Fox Piven and Richard A. Cloward, in another context, point out that the state undertakes poverty alleviation programs more out of concerns about its own stability than being "welfarist" in orientation. Citing the case of the United States, they argue that "historical evidence suggests that relief arrangements are initiated or expanded during occasional outbreaks of civil disorder produced by mass unemployment [e.g. 1930s and 1960s], and are then abolished or contracted when political instability is restored [e.g., 1980s] … expansive relief policies are designed to mute civil disorder, and restrictive ones to reinforce work norms."[169]

While the investment pattern in India clearly favored the powerful classes, the State could mobilize investment only through increased taxation. In the event of large scale tax evasion by the rich, and the various demands that the dominant classes made on

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[168] Rao, Towards Understanding Semi-Feudal Semi-Colonial Society.

[169] Frances Fox Piven, Richard A. Cloward, Regulating the Poor: The Functions of Public Welfare, (New York: Vintage Books, 1971), p. xiii.

the state, the latter had to resort to putting a squeeze on the workers. This led to unrest among vast sections of workers, and therefore a legitimization problem for the state that was destabilized. According to Patnaik,

> "… the crisis of this system arises from the fact that the State has to simultaneously fulfill two distinct functions, namely keep expanding the State capitalist sector and at the same time allow its exchequer to be used for primitive accumulation by bourgeois and proto-bourgeois elements."[170]

This situation led to an overall worsening of the financial condition of the State, as India's external debt burden increased from 20 billion dollars in 1981 to 80 billion dollar in 1991. Meanwhile, the International Monetary Fund (IMF), while providing loan assistance, sought to influence the direction of the economy in India. As a result of these various factors, the Indian state, which was characterized as "dirigiste" and undertook import substitution policies in the immediate aftermath of decolonization, resorted to liberalization polices of "structural adjustment" in 1991, thus joining the processes of globalization.[171]

The point of the above description of Indian development is to show that development, as modernization or capitalistic development in India, was not a neutral process. Murphy points out that the traditional ontology of development as modernization, while assuming that all persons are "conduits of economic activity," effectively seeks to hide the "social rivalry" that is at the core of the system.[172] To sum up, development in India, through a complex web of processes, strengthened the

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[170] Prabhat Patnaik, "Some Indian Debates on Planning" in Terence J. Byres (Ed.), <u>The Indian Economy: Major Debates Since Independence</u>, (Oxford, New York: Oxford University Press, 1998), p. 178.

[171] <u>Ibid.</u>

[172] John W. Murphy, "The Traditional Ontology of Development, History, and Globalization from Below" in Jung Min Choi, John W. Murphy, Manuel J. Caro (Eds.), <u>Globalization with a Human Face</u>, (Westport, Conn., London: Praeger, 2004), p. 13.

dominant classes while further deterring the realization of the human capabilities of the many. These social inequalities would deepen further after economic liberalization in 1991.

Globalization, Neoliberalism, and Indian Development

Although external capital played a critical role in postcolonial development, arguments in favor of the state giving up its role in the economy, and letting (global) private players operate freely in the Indian market (liberalization), started gaining ground. Supported by the Bretton Woods Institutions, in the 1980s pressures to loosen state controls on industrialization emerged. The processes of liberalization and structural adjustment were said to have heralded the era of globalization. This buzzword has created some conceptual confusion with its tendency to mean everything to everyone. For analytical purposes, globalization should be distinguished from neoliberalism, although the two are closely related. However, such a conceptual distinction is necessary primarily because globalization is often discussed in structuralist terms, and is often presented with a sense of inevitability, historical or otherwise, however contestable. On the other hand, as David Harvey[173] points out, neoliberalism is a class project whereby the concrete social actors, and their actions, can be understood in conjunction with certain developments in global capitalism.

Globalization has often been discussed in structural terms as the compression of space and time – stretching the scale of social and economic processes across space

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[173] David Harvey, <u>A Brief History of Neoliberalism</u>, (Oxford, New York: Oxford University Press, 2005).

through technology.[174] According to Ulrich Beck, globalization "denotes the *processes* through which sovereign nation states are criss-crossed and undermined by transnational actors with varying prospects of power, orientations, identities and networks."[175] On similar lines, while stretching the spatial imagery into social relations, Scholte[176] thinks of the current condition of "globality" as characterized by "supraterritoriality" – the ability to transcend spaces. The idea advanced here is that while territoriality (or space boundedness) was an important condition of modernity, in times of globality social relations are reconfigured across spaces and have been "deterritorialized."[177] Thus Scholte says: "With globalization we conceive of the world not only as a patchwork of territorial realms, but also as a single place where territorial distance and borders are (at least in certain respects) irrelevant."[178]

In modernity the scale of social experiences, or the factors that constituted the subjectivities of people, were limited in spatial terms to the framework of nation-states. Specifically, the state identified with the nation as a territorially bound entity, and thus was entrusted with the responsibility of ensuring social order within particular spatial limits. On the other hand, the nation participated "inter-nationally" in the "community of nations" through processes of international/foreign relations, thus consolidating and configuring people's subjectivities and identities in finite or local terms. In contrast, the

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[174] Saskia Sassen, <u>A Sociology of Globalization</u>, (New York, London: W.W. Norton & Company, 2007).

[175] Ulrich Beck, (Trans. by Patrick Camiller), <u>What is Globalization?</u> (Cambridge, UK: Polity Press, 2000), p. 11.

[176] Jan Aart Scholte, <u>Globalization: A Critical Introduction</u>. (New York: Palgrave, 2000).

[177] <u>Ibid.</u> pp. 41-61

[178] It is argued that, with globalization, 'methodological territorialism' practiced earlier becomes redundant. <u>Ibid</u>. p. 54

emergence of the "world society" has elevated in importance the global nature of new subjectivities. With the geographical expansion of migration and movement of people,[179] production processes, transportation facilities,[180] financial markets, transnational corporations, voluntary associations, activists forums and networks,[181] and cultural forms, people do not live locally any more[182]. These processes create transnational spaces that are thought to produce "multiplicity [of subjectivities] without unity"[183] in these "inexorable" trends towards unicity of the world despite claims to hybridity and heterogeneity.[184] Clearly, in much of these writings, technology is understood as a crucial factor that determines this new reconfiguration of social life. The importance of these structurally oriented analyses is that the orderly world, whose social order was provided earlier by the "anarchy of nations," has been suddenly thrown into disorder.

The resulting confusion has been confounded by the claim that nation-states have been rendered powerless by the triumphant march of the global market.[185] While one side

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[179] Norma Chinchilla, "Globalization, International Migration, and Transnationalism: Some Observations Based on the Central American Experience," and Rhacel Salazar Parrenas, "The International Division of Reproductive Labor: Paid Domestic Work and Globalization" in Richard P. Appelbaum and William Robinson (Eds.), Critical Globalization Studies, (New York, London: Routledge, 2005).

[180] Edna Bonacich, "Labor and the Global Logistic Revolution" in Richard P. Appelbaum and William Robinson (Eds.), Critical Globalization Studies, (New York, London: Routledge, 2005).

[181] Valentine M Moghadam, "Globalization and Transnational Feminist Networks (or How Neoliberalism and Fundamentalism Riled the World's Women)" in Richard P. Appelbaum and William Robinson (Eds.), Critical Globalization Studies, (New York, London: Routledge, 2005).

[182] Beck, What is Globalization?.

[183] Ibid. Martin Albrow, The Global Age: State and Society beyond Modernity. (Stanford: Stanford University Press; 1995).

[184] Roland Robertson, Globalization: Social Theory and Global Culture, (London: Sage Publications, 1992), p. 26.

[185] Susan Strange, The Retreat of the State: The Diffusion of Power in the World Economy, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996).

of the debate argues that the nation-state has been incapacitated, other views point out that the state is a crucial player in fostering processes of globalization. Additionally, astute observers point out that most states, instead of becoming powerless, have in fact reoriented their priorities and policies in line with neoliberal prescriptions, thereby becoming party to globalization of a specific kind.[186]

The strength of this latter analysis lies in the effort to understand these changes as brought about not merely by structural processes, but instead the active intervention of global capital. Accordingly, trends that characterize contemporary globalization – particularly the neoliberal sort – are part of a historical project of global capitalism. Unlike the proponents of globalization theory, those who emphasize neoliberalism do not see an "epistemic" break with earlier forms of capitalism/modernity. As McMichael points out, while these trends may be larger in scale and more visible now, they are part of global capitalism that emerged through colonialism and the consolidation during post-world war II developmentalism.[187] Similar arguments have been advanced by others who point out that neoliberalism is the latest face of global capitalism, a response to the crisis of accumulation and characterized by intense levels of "primitive accumulation" in the Third World.[188]

According to Harvey:

"Neoliberalism is in the first instance a theory of political economic practices that proposes that human well-being can best be advanced by liberating individual entrepreneurial freedoms and skills within an

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[186] Harvey. A Brief History of Neoliberalism.

[187] McMichael, "Globalization: Myths and Realities."

[188] Terence J. Byres, "Neoliberalism and Primitive Accumulation in Less Developed Countries" in Alfredo Saad-Filho, Deborah Johnston, Neoliberalism: A Critical Reader. (London, Ann Arbor, MI: Pluto Press, 2005).

institutional framework characterized by strong private property rights, free markets, and free trade."[189]

Central to neoliberalism, therefore, is an image of the market as free from encumbrances, supported by a strong state whose primary responsibility is upholding the laws and institutions of private property. Consistent with Schumpeter's idea of creative destruction, the market is thought to favor those with entrepreneurial abilities by unleashing human creativity, which is presented as a key contribution to modern civilization. Evidently, these formulations, in the writings of Frederick von Hayek and Milton Freedman, feature several ideas proposed by Adam Smith – e.g. the hidden hand of the market that can mobilize the animal instincts in mankind – and evolutionary theory. And consistent with Fukuyama's belief in the end of history,[190] the market is portrayed as a mechanism that has transcended history.

Yet, ironically, in practice, the project of neoliberalism is vastly different from the ahistorical, apolitical picture that is presented. For example, Peck and Tindell[191] point out that neoliberalism, as a class project, has strengthened the power of the elite. Despite the apolitical guise, deployed by "technocrats," think tanks, and key institutions, the neoliberal infrastructure becomes aligned with the centers of power and, like colonialism, often strengthens them. Thus, in countries like India, despite experiencing economic growth in sectors such as finance, the fruits of the growth have tended to accumulate among the elite who are privileged traditionally on the basis of class, caste, gender, region, etc. The result has been ever increasing levels of social inequality.

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[189] Harvey, A Brief History of Neoliberalism, p. 2

[190] Francis Fukuyama, The End of History and Last Man, (New York: Avon, 1993).

[191] Jamie Peck, Adam Tindell, "Neoliberalizing Space" in Antipode (2002), pp. 380-404.

According to Harvey, neoliberalism has promoted a reorganization of capitalism, with an emphasis on accumulation, following the consolidation that marked post-war developmentalism.[192] The emergence of a new form of capital – finance capital – whose emergence was fostered by developments in technology, has characterized neoliberalism. While the Fordist model of increased production led to a crisis of "realization" – i.e. the inability to find consumers for all that is produced – global capitalism that emphasizes finance has led to a realization of profits while reducing the risk of overproduction. Thus "restructuring" has become the current catchword, and in the process different modes of accumulation, such as primitive accumulation,[193] have been employed on a world scale. Through restructuring, the welfare state has been dismantled in the West, while concomitantly the developmentalist state in the Third World, although hardly development oriented in an inclusive way, came under fire to discard developmentalism and became open to Indian elites as well as big businesses and Transnational Corporations (TNCs) from outside, all of whom often work in tandem.[194]

In India, while the call for 'free markets' had been present since decolonization, until the 1980s the agents of the free market did not have enough strength and resources to enforce a turnaround in the state-led economic processes. However, in the aftermath of the global crisis in the 1970s, India was faced with a deterioration of trade; this trend resulted in a recession in the 1980s, which has been characterized as a "lost decade" for

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[192] Harvey, <u>A Brief History of Neoliberalism.</u>

[193] <u>Ibid.</u>; Jim Glassman, "Primitive accumulation, accumulation by dispossession, accumulation by 'extra-economic means", <u>Progress in Human Geography,</u> (30:5 (2006)), pp. 608-625.

[194] Leslie Sklair, "Generic Globalization, Capitalist Globalization, and Beyond: A Framework for Critical Globalization Studies" in Richard P. Appelbaum, William Robinson (Eds.), <u>Critical Globalization Studies,</u> (New York, London: Routledge, 2005).

the Third World.[195] Additionally, the state had resorted to high levels of external borrowing from the IMF to meet the recession. Further worsening of the debt situation, the pressure from the IMF to liberalize, and support for such policy changes from an increasingly influential section of the bureaucracy in India, led to the government adopting the policies linked to structural adjustment in the early 1990s.

With neo-liberal globalization, its apologists claimed, the state-imposed shackles on the economy will be broken and "animal spirits" will be released, ultimately leading to higher economic growth and the productivity gains that are associated with more efficient management. Thus with competition at the global level, Indian entrepreneurs would be forced to adopt "international" standards. Taken together, changes will increase the standard of living and reduce social ills like poverty, because the invisible hand of the market will work in ways that ensure the most effective distribution of wealth.[196] In opposition to this, the critics of neo-liberal globalization pointed to the experiences elsewhere, and argued that such changes lead neither to employment generation nor to a reduction in poverty, particularly in the marginalized sections of society. Evidence from the post-liberalization era in India has borne out this criticism.[197]

Some of the discourses of neo-liberalism in the Third World are worth considering. Neoliberalism, ironically, operates through a false dichotomy between state sponsored developmentalism (the problems of which were discussed above) and this new "liberation" from the state. Increased rates of accumulation, particularly in the cities,

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[195] McMichael. "Globalization: Myths and Realities."

[196] Jayati Ghosh, "Liberalization Debates" in Terence J. Byres (Ed.), The Indian Economy: Major Debates Since Independence. (Oxford, New York: Oxford University Press, 1998).

[197] C.P. Chandrasekhar, Jayati Ghosh, The Market that Failed: A Decade of Neoliberal Economic Reforms in India, (New Delhi: Leftword Books, 2002).

have created a spectacle of wealth production, thereby alluring the middle classes to internalize the ideology that "someday, they will be also able to make it". Thus, the emergence of the neoliberal discourse was accompanied by many "rags to riches stories," akin to the so-called "American dream." On the other hand, since the state would be out of the economy, development as industrialization would require the arrival of big players with money. Accordingly, elite groups in India have expanded their influence, along with TNCs such as Coca Cola through their "Indianized" versions. Thus, the state machinery, political parties, and civil society all largely agree that the path to "development" is neoliberalism, thereby excluding the people who are often harshly subjected to the whims of the market.

Kerala's Experience with Development

According to traditional wisdom, economic development has to happen prior to social development. Following this lead, development in India was interpreted to mean modernization while focusing primarily on economic growth. Although the state did seek occasionally to regulate social development, the emphasis largely was on structural factors rather than the participation of people in this process. Tornquist[198] points out that a crucial question facing many developing societies relates to popular participation and the nature of democracy: "how to ensure that ordinary people can influence emerging questions [that impact their existence]?"

In contrast to such economic growth-based approaches has been the experiences of development in Kerala, whereby the active mobilization of people and the policies

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[198] Olle Tornquist, "The New Popular Politics of Development: Kerala's Experience" in Govindan Parayil (Ed.), Kerala: The Development Experience, (London, New York: Zed Books, 2000), p. 116.

implemented by the State resulted in a radical advancement of human capabilities.[199] In Kerala, the southern most state in India with a population of 32 million, social development was pursued with some success even without large scale industrial expansion. In this sense, Kerala has had a trajectory of development substantially different from the other states, despite working within the larger political framework of India. Many advocates of this strategy often refer to the resulting growth as the "Kerala Model of Development." According to them the Kerala model emphasizes the mobilization of people and resources, and the role of such public action in improving the conditions of people and generating high levels of social development within less developed countries with low incomes. Kerala's developmental experience will be discussed in this section, while the plight of those who have been left behind in this development model – particularly the tribal people in Kerala – will be discussed in the next.

Kerala became a part of the Republic of India in 1956. The state is constituted by three regions, two of which – Travancore and Cochin – while dominated by the British were not under direct British rule, and a third – Malabar – that was part of Madras Presidency of British Colonial India. Having been an extremely feudalized society, where levels of caste-based oppression were high in the 19th century, various communities in Kerala organized many strong social reform movements that challenged these oppressive practices. These social movements resulted in a restoration of civil liberties to the oppressed classes, particularly the right to education. Additionally, these movements emphasized the role of education in eliminating feudalism. Aside from these movements,

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[199] Jean Dreze, Amartya Sen (Eds.), Indian Development: Selected Regional Perspectives, (Oxford and New Delhi: Clarendon Press and Oxford University Press, 1997).

the pursuit of education by the lower castes was helped by the Christian missionaries who established schools, thereby providing opportunities for educating these persons. However, these efforts were met with resistance from the upper castes.[200] All of these factors, along with the anti-colonial movement and a strong left movement, contributed to an environment of activism and increased participation of Kerala's people in the public sphere during the middle of the 20th century.

As a result of this large scale mobilization of people and the efforts to eliminate rigid caste hierarchies, in 1957 the people of Kerala elected, within the liberal democratic framework, an administration led by the Communist Party of India (CPI). In subsequent decades, Kerala's political formations consolidated into two broad fronts – one is the Left Democratic Front (LDF) led by the Communist Party of India (Marxist), which in reality is a reformist party with a social democratic orientation. The other is the United Democratic Front (UDF) that is led by the Indian National Congress (INC), a center-right party that was the champion of the anti-colonial movement. Since the 1980s, the two fronts have alternated winning every state legislative assembly election that takes place every five years.

One of Kerala's earliest points of departure from the mainstream style of planned development pertained to land redistribution. Kerala's popular land reforms, however limited, surpassed similar attempts elsewhere in India in scope and their ability to challenge the power of feudal landlords and empower marginalized people. According to Tornquist, these social changes brought about

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[200] E.T. Mathew, "Growth of Literacy in Kerala: State Intervention, Missionary Initiatives and Social Movements," http://www.scribd.com/doc/4369/kerala-model (1999).

one of the Third World's strongest civil societies… where public debate is lively, the free media are multiple, and the majority of citizens are literate and voluntarily participate in a multitude of wide-ranging organizations – socioreligious associations, educational bodies, development organizations, environmental groups, women's organizations.[201]

Several commentators have traced the active civil society in Kerala to social movements against feudalism, and public demands for social and religious equality that started in the middle of the 19th century.[202] However, despite its contributions to a buoyant and progressive public life in Kerala, civil society has been fragmentary and comprised of exclusivist social and religious organizations.

Some critics have claimed that the mobilization of civil society had, at least in the initial days, led to a responsive state that sought to meet public demands. Dreze and Sen point out that although Kerala had higher literacy levels than most other Indian states even at the time of decolonization, in the initial days of independence – in the 1950s and 1960s – Kerala was among the states with the highest incidence of poverty.[203] Although non-left parties came to power in Kerala in the subsequent elections, the state responded largely to the demands of the mobilized public by focusing on social development.[204] Social development in Kerala related primarily in the areas of health, literacy, and education, with food distribution achieving results that are uncharacteristic of less developed societies, particularly in the absence of large-scale industrialization.

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[201] Tonrnquist, "The New Popular Politics of Development: Kerala's Experience."

[202] See Mathew, "Growth of Literacy in Kerala: State Intervention, Missionary Initiatives and Social Movements"; See also various articles in Govindan Parayil, (Ed.), Kerala: The Development Experience, (New York: Zed Books, 2000).

[203] Dreze and Sen, Indian Development: Selected Regional Perspectives.

[204] Parayil, Kerala: The Development Experience.

V.K. Ramachandran describes some of the salient features of the Kerala Model in advancing human development.[205] In terms of public health in Kerala since the end of colonialism, the life expectancy of both men and women at birth have increased – at an average of 69 years for men and 74 for women, this rate is much higher than the national average in India. Fertility and birth rates have declined, a trend contrary to the overall increase in population in India. According to Ramachandran, "the ratio of men to women in the population is characteristic of a society where there is no systemic bias against survival of girls and women."[206] The infant mortality rate (of children aged 5 years or less) and death rate have declined. The decline in the infant mortality rate is associated with an improvement in pre-natal and post-natal care services in the state. Also, the state took the lead in providing immunization to children.

Another contributing factor to overall improvement in the health standards of people in Kerala is the improvement in child nutrition, which is substantially higher than in the rest of India. The effective public food distribution system in the state has been instrumental in providing essential commodities to particularly the poor. Additionally, literacy campaigns throughout the state resulted in the achievement of almost 100 percent literacy among people of Kerala in the 1990s. This effort further resulted in a high proportion of educated persons in the state. As Ramachandran points out,

> "Literacy is a foundational feature of Kerala's political culture, crucial in the creation of public opinion and essential to the individual and political rights that are so conspicuous a feature of social and political life in Kerala… Owing to the prevalent levels of literacy, the dissemination of information by means of the written word goes much deeper in Kerala…

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[205] V.K. Ramachandran, "Kerala's Development Achievements and their Replicability" in Govindan Parayil (Ed.), Kerala: The Development Experience, (London, New York: Zed Books, 2000).

[206] Ibid. p. 88

this has important implications for the quality and depth of public opinion, and of participatory democracy in the state."[207]

However, these advancements in human capabilities and increased participation of people in public life were not accompanied by a substantial change in the economy. Like elsewhere in India, development remained vertical, which helped to consolidate the elite classes, while the truly participatory forms of development, including challenging the social inequalities, remained mostly unexplored. While traditional agricultural production – primarily rice – has been stagnating, the economic system put in place during colonial times still dominates, and production is focused primarily on raw materials for export. The weak industrialization in the state has been cited by many as one of the weaknesses of the Kerala model.[208] The predominant sector that is growing in the state is the service sector. High levels of education have produced large sections of trained manpower, who seek employment in urban centers elsewhere in India or abroad, particularly in the Middle East after the oil boom. While remittances from these expatriates make a significant contribution to the economy, the relative lack of production in Kerala has led to an increasing reliance on imported goods for consumption. This situation has also seen increasing inequality among sections of people.

All these factors have left Kerala heavily dependent on the global capitalist system. Clear evidence of this was when Kerala faced a severe crisis as a result of the first Gulf War in early 1990s. In the absence of the mobilization of people to guide alternative production processes, they have become dependent on the state. Tornquist points out:

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[207] Ibid. p. 94

[208] Joseph Tharamangalam, "The Perils of Social Development without Economic Growth: The Development Debacle in Kerala, India" in Bulletin of Concerned Asian Scholars (30(1) 1998), 23-34

> "demands from below for measures from above have helped to produce unwieldy, expensive, centralized and badly coordinated state organs. The bosses and employees of these organs, moreover, have developed their own special interests, The different groupings in civil society, finally, have left their stamp on the parties and on political life in general, as have a range of trade unions and cooperatives."[209]

This trend has further reinforced the power structures, thus resulting in what has been referred to as a crisis in the Kerala model in the 1990s.

Furthermore, the policies of liberalization initiated by the federal government of India have put pressures on individual states, including Kerala, to follow similar policies. Proponents declare that neoliberalism works through competition to attract capital investment.[210] It is in this context that the discourse of industrialization – particularly through capitalist processes – became prominent in Kerala. Faced with such pressures, the political parties in Kerala, including the Left Front, were convinced that the only way for Kerala to develop further was to invite foreign direct investment. The decision of the state administration to invite Coca Cola to invest in production facilities in Plachimada was a result of such pressures.

The response to the crisis, however, was not only a neoliberal policy pursued by the federal government. In the mid 1990s, with the help of civil society organizations and a large scale mobilization of the public, the state administration – led by the Left Front – attempted what has been referred to as "democratic decentralization" of governance, along the lines similar to those in Porto Allegre and South Africa.[211] In considering the

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[209] Tornquist, "The New Popular Politics of Development: Kerala's Experience", p. 119

[210] Peck and Tindell, "Neoliberalizing Space."

[211] Patrick Heller, "Moving the State: Politics of Democratic Decentralization in Kerala, South Africa and Porto Alegre" in <u>Politics and Society,</u> (2001;29), pp. 131-163.

context of the Plachimada movement, this decentralization strategy in Kerala is important.

As mentioned above, in Kerala, like elsewhere in India, development planning was thought to be the work of the experts that is implemented through the bureaucracy. In this extremely centralized process, state machinery became increasingly inefficient, aside from local participation not figuring into the actual development agenda. This approach was in the case of Kerala, despite the active civil society and higher levels of popular participation than elsewhere in the country.[212]

The move towards decentralization started with a campaign to map the local resources in different parts of the state, with a view to working out alternative forms of development. This resource mapping campaign revealed that the lowest body of the state at the local level – the Panchayat – had to be empowered, so that local self-rule could be implemented, particularly with regard to the direction of development. This insight resulted in the initial efforts to implement local self-governance through elected Panchayats in the mid 1990s.

A crucial aspect of this "decentralization of powers" was that, compared to earlier practice, a larger share of the state budget is allocated to the lower bodies of the state for developmental purposes, in tune with the idea of "planning from below." According to Tornquist, as part of the decentralization process, which was intended to empower people, efforts were made at the local level to unite the splintered civil society.[213] However, a crucial question often not addressed in the literature on the decentralization

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[212] Tornquist, "The New Popular Politics of Development: Kerala's Experience."

[213] Ibid.

experiment in Kerala is the existence of class and other divisions in society that, if not addressed, have the potential to influence crucially the direction of localized planning. The forms of social conflict and the power structures within individual villages have to be addressed, as much as the influence of extraneous factors, particularly in the context of globalization. Veron points out that the decentralization initiatives have not succeeded in overcoming these factors:

> "conflicting interests of groups differentiated by class, caste, gender, locality and political affiliation may remain an obstacle for community-based sustainable development… Decentralization planning needs to become an iterative, continuing process in order to enhance accountability for all the involved actors."[214]

The Social Condition of Tribal Communities

Tribal communities, in general, are considered among the most oppressed social groups all over India. While their marginality is produced within feudal social norms, policies of development promoted by the state in India have contributed to furthering their oppression. The process of planned development championed by the state in India over the last 60 years (since independence from Britain) has led to a mass displacement of people. Several analyses have shown that many showpiece developmental projects of independent India, such as big dams and heavy industries were often located in tribal areas thereby displacing them in the process.[215] Walter Fernandes points out that of those either displaced or affected by development programs, 40 percent are tribal people,

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[214] Rene Veron, "Sustainability and the 'New' Kerala Model" in Govindan Parayil (Ed.), Kerala: The Development Experience, (London, New York: Zed Books, 2000), p. 228.

[215] Rao, Towards Understanding Semi-Feudal Semi-Colonial Society.

whereas all over India tribal people constitute only 8.08 percent of the country's population.[216]

In Kerala, while macro-indicators point to a general improvement in living standards of the people aided by the Kerala model of development, there is an increasing consensus that this model, like developmental trajectories followed elsewhere in India, has failed the tribal communities.[217] Such claims have been supported by reported incidents of 32 tribal people losing their lives to poverty in 2001, in a state where such occurrences are extremely rare among the mainstream population.[218] In Kerala, tribal communities are largely concentrated in the hilly tracks on the eastern border, and numbering about 321,000, they form 1.1 percent of the total population of the state. Most of the tribal people in Kerala are either poor peasants or agricultural laborers. In the northern districts in Kerala, including Palakkad, of which Plachimada is a part, only 5 percent of the tribal population is small farmers, whereas 82 percent work as agricultural laborers.

The prevalent effects of structural inequality on tribal communities are many. Only 13 percent of the students from tribal communities manage to pass matriculation (10th year of school education). As mentioned earlier, unemployment is the biggest problem facing the agrarian populations in India. In 2001, about 25,500 tribal people in

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[216] Walter Fernandes, "Development-induced Displacement and Tribal Women" in Govind Chandra Rath, Tribal Development in India: The Contemporary Debate, (New Delhi/Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications, 2006), pp. 112-130.

[217] C.R. Bijoy, K. Ravi Raman, "Muthanga: The Real Story – Adivasi Movement to Recover Land", Economic and Political Weekly, (2003 May 17).

[218] Jos Chathukulam, M.S. John, "Issues in Tribal Development: The Recent Experience of Kerala" in Govind Chandra Rath, Tribal Development in India: The Contemporary Debate, (New Delhi/Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications, 2006), pp. 182-202.

the age group of 15-40 years were unemployed. According to a survey conducted by the Integrated Rural Development Program (IRDP) in India, about 40 percent of the tribal population in Kerala lives below poverty line. In Palakkad district, where Plachimada is located, 53 percent of the tribal population lives below the poverty line.[219]

As per an economic survey conducted in 1996, 28 percent of the tribal people are without houses.[220] Infant mortality is high relative to the mainstream.[221] The per capita health expenditure of the tribes is higher than that of the general population. Leprosy, skin diseases, tuberculosis, anaemia, sickle cell anaemia, and diarrhoea are frequently reported.[222] The continuation of feudal social relations in varying degrees means that several incidents of attack and atrocities against tribal people are reported every year. Aside from these direct attacks, instances of harassment by government officials and others are also frequently reported.[223] Needless to say, the tribal people's access to the mainstream political processes and representation in the political institutions is minimal.

The federal and state governments, as part of the five year plans, have devised several programs, such as the "Tribal Sub-Plan" and "Integrated Tribal Development Plan," that are intended to focus specifically on the social development of marginalized tribal communities. Such attempts were also a part of the experiment with the democratic decentralization in Kerala. However, because these attempts are often undertaken through bureaucracy, there have been reports of large scale misutilization and misappropriation of

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[219] Ibid.

[220] Ibid.

[221] Ibid.

[222] Ibid.

[223] Bijoy, Ravi Raman, "Muthanga: The Real Story – Adivasi Movement to Recover Land."

funds meant for tribal communities.[224] Evidently, these structural inequalities are maintained and reproduced as part of the ongoing oppression of tribal communities in a now semi-feudal society that once enslaved them. Thus, in this cycle of reproduction of their oppression, these communities are often unable to realize their collective goals, particularly through the mainstream agencies of the state and civil society. It is in this context that, in the 1990s, the tribal communities in Kerala together decided to launch a movement to get back the land taken away from them during the course of the 20th century.

"Land alienation" has been identified as the fundamental problem facing the tribal population in Kerala. Many settlers from the southern regions of Kerala, at several stages during the 20th century, appropriated forest and non-forest land that belonged to tribal communities to set up large plantation-type farms that grow spices and other crops, such as rubber, for export to the world market. Apart from individual settlers, the State – in the early days – also engaged in land appropriation under the guise of different development schemes. Several reports point out that these plots of land were grabbed fraudulently from the tribal communities, as a result of exploiting their ignorance regarding the legalities of land ownership.[225] The higher levels of tribal people being landless agricultural laborers (55.47 percent), as compared to the national average (32.99 percent), is an indicator of the level of land alienation affecting tribal communities in Kerala. After identifying this as a serious issue, in 1975 the state administration was forced to pass a law stressed the inalienability of tribal land. Ever since, several tribal families have

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[224] Chathukulam and John, "Issues in Tribal Development: The Recent Experience of Kerala."

[225] Ibid.

petitioned the government to restorate their alienated land. However, such efforts did not prove fruitful, as the powerful social classes with political influence managed to scuttle these efforts through various means, including engaging in long legal battles. This tactic meant effectively that the 1975 legislation was never quite implemented.[226]

In 2001, the various tribal communities started a non-violent protest against the State, while seeking to get the latter to address the question of land alienation that caused widespread unemployment, and the 23 cases of poverty-caused death among tribal people in 2001. This movement gained widespread support in civil society and among public intellectuals in Kerala. However, the mainstream parties viewed this movement of the tribal people with suspicion. Although, as the protest advanced, the two main political fronts in the state – both centre-right and center-left – were forced to acknowledge the seriousness of the problem, the fact that the tribal communities are marginal in society meant that the movement did not find much active support among the mainstream politicians.

Regardless, this movement for land restoration helped to mobilize the tribal communities to demand civil and political rights.[227] This general buoyancy was manifested in several attempts at organizing tribal communities in the region where Plachimada is located, in order to avoid physical and other attacks by the feudal elements in society and the agents of the state. It was in this context that the tribal people of Plachimada decided to resist Coca Cola, who had, with the approval of the state, sought

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[226] Bijoy and Ravi Raman, "Muthanga: The Real Story – Adivasi Movement to Recover Land."

[227] C.R. Bijoy, "Kerala's Plachimada Struggle: A Narrative on Water and Governance Rights" in Economic and Political Weekly, (October 14, 2006).

to "expropriate yet another life sustaining resource – water – from Plachimada to 'develop' this backward region to add figures to the state GDP."[228]

Towards Situating the Plachimada Movement

The effort in this chapter is to show that people, whose subjectivities are often thought of as merely "local," are in fact often subjected to global processes that are linked with localized elements. Understanding the many dimensions of these processes is a precondition to unraveling local subjectivities and the efforts to control this source of agency. To be sure, these processes of control are not indiscriminately "determined" by history, nor are they structures that exist *sui generis*. These processes should be understood as intermingled with the interests of particular social classes/actors, who in conscious ways seek to influence the rest of society. Most important for those who challenge these processes, by seeking to bring about democratic transformations in all spheres of social life, is that they intervene consciously in these processes. A social movement provides precisely such an opportunity.

Accordingly, in this chapter the processes of forming subjectivities are traced through the colonial experience, the post-colonial phase of developmentalism, and the stage of neoliberal restructuring of the relationship between state and civil society in India. In undertaking such a historical sweep of Indian society, the effort is to locate within a *long durée* the social classes and their transformations – both in the persisting forms of feudal social relations and their integration within global capitalism. In the light of the above discussion, a society of predominantly tribal people in Plachimada can be understood to have lived through multiple forms of exploitive relationships that are not

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[228] Ibid. p.4333.

distinct from one another. Yet, these oppressive associations are often normalized in the larger discursive practices of the "mainstream" society, thereby routinizing obstacles and limiting the self-determination of the populace.

CHAPTER 4

The Anti-Coca Cola Movement in Plachimada: A Description

This chapter will describe both the various events and processes that led to the emergence of the anti-Coca Cola movement in Plachimada. Specifically, the description will focus on the social conditions in Plachimada, the establishment of a Coca Cola plant, the various changes this development brought about, the social conditions that emerged, and the initial momentum for the social movement. This chapter will focus also on the growth of the social movement, identify the particular actors/agents involved, their articulation of the problem, and the arguments within the social movement between resolutions.

Further, an effort will also be made to understand how the social movement interacted with the existing political structure – the state, bureaucracy, political parties etc. – and the media and how this collective action addressed the structures of power, including social hierarchies and inequalities at the local level. In other words, the internal working of the social movement organizations, and how the Plachimada movement interacted with other similar social movements in India and elsewhere will be described in detail. The material for the description was largely collected through interviews, observation, newspaper reports, and other archival material.

At the outset, the movement started as a response to the problem of water pollution and depletion that the communities in Plachimada faced. The initial thrust of the movement came from organizations that were resisting the marginalization and oppression of tribal and lower caste people in Kerala. The behavior of the political parties and agencies of the state toward the movement was characterized by animosity. The

mainstream media, barring few, ignored the movement; the police force was often used to clamp down on the people associated with the movement; and political parties across the spectrum initially threatened the movement's organizers. On the other hand, many organizations and activists that are part of the civil society in Kerala came forward to support the movement. There were debates within the movement on defining the goals and purpose of the movement and the nature of reality faced by the movement. With increased support over time, the political parties and agencies of the state came on board. The main struggle in the movement, eventually, became confined to the agencies of the State and Courts. Eventually, although the High Court of Kerala ruled that the Coca Cola plant should be allowed to operate, it is currently closed.

Social Life in Plachimada

Plachimada is part of an agrarian region in the eastern part of the Palakkad district of Kerala. In terms of the administrative structure of the state, Plachimada falls in the "Village Panchayat"[229] of Perumatty, which has a population of 29,500.[230] Being a predominantly agrarian area, the major social classes that constitute the population are the land owners, who are often of upper and middle castes, and landless agricultural laborers who belong to "lower" caste and tribal groups. While the land owning classes own most of the cultivable land, the lower caste and tribal people own small plots of land for dwelling. Perumatty Panchayat consists of Moolathara (of which Plachimada is part), Vandithavalam and Perumatty, and parts of Pattancherry and Thathamangalam villages

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[229] In the multi-tier governance mechanism in India, the village 'panchayat' is the local governing body and constitutes the institution of the state at the lowest level. Often, as part of administrative functions, a given place is identified as part of a panchayat, which itself is part of a bigger district.

[230] According to Census data collected in 1991.

with an area of 60.79 square kilometers. These villages are divided into "colonies" where predominantly lower caste groups and tribal people live. The plant is located in Moolathara village, immediately bordering different colonies such as Plachimada, Vijaya Nagar, and Rajiv Nagar. Ever since the social movement against Coca Cola started, the place – including the village Moolathara – has become popularly referred to as Plachimada. In demographic terms, lower caste groups constitute about 10 percent and tribal people about 40 percent of the total population of the area (seven such colonies claimed to be affected by pollution and depletion of ground water).[231]

This region falls in the rain-shadow region close to the hills on the Eastern border of Kerala. However, since the region predominantly has marshy land conducive for paddy cultivation, water for irrigation purposes is provided by nearby dams through canals. In the close vicinity of the Coca Cola plant in Plachimada (less than two miles) are three dam reservoirs. A canal that irrigates the farmland passes about 10-15 meters from the premises of the Coca Cola plant. While most of the land was once used for paddy/rice cultivation, now many of the farmers have opted for more lucrative crops such as coconut, groundnut, mango, vegetables, bananas, or flowers, along with paddy. The male landless agricultural laborer, on average, makes as low as 80 Rupees (equivalent of 2 dollars), whereas the women laborers make about 40 Rupees (equivalent of 1 dollar) a day. They often get to work no more than 125 days a year.[232] This means that most of the agricultural laborers are extremely poor.

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[231] Bijoy, "Kerala's Plachimada Struggle: A Narrative on Water and Governance Rights."

[232] Ibid.

Coca Cola in Plachimada

Coca Cola, which had been part of the soft-drinks market in India, was expelled by the Government of India in 1977. However, in the aftermath of economic liberalization, it reentered the Indian market in the early 1990s. Coca Cola established its Indian subsidiary – Hindustan Coca Cola Beverages Private Limited (HCCB) – in 1993. According to a report by the management of HCCB, the company described itself as a "professionally managed Indian company registered in India."[233] In the context of globalization, despite Kerala's achievements in human development without substantial industrialization, there had developed a popular discourse (particularly among the middle classes) that called for increasing industrialization. Some critics argued that Kerala is stagnating because of the politically active public sphere and the left-oriented trade unionism. In the wake of economic liberalization all over India, these demands strengthened. Thus, development became the prime discourse, although what constituted development was hardly a question of discussions in the public forums. In the absence of such questions, development came to be equated with industrialization in the popular imagination. Since the state did not have the fiscal capacity to undertake such large scale industrialization, it was widely thought that there is a need to bring in private investment, particularly from the West, through Foreign Direct Investment (FDI).

In 1999, after an invitation from the Left Democratic Front (LDF), an alliance of social democratic parties that was ruling Kerala, HCCB decided to set up a bottling plant in Plachimada. The ruling LDF committed itself to providing the required infrastructure for the HCCB plant. The HCCB plant was brought in through what has been referred to

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[233] HCCB described itself thus in a report to a Joint Parliamentary Committee of India that investigated into allegations against Coca Cola.

as the "green channel" single window system. This means that the investment process was made easier by providing the required license to operate without close scrutiny regarding environmental impact, land use, and other specifications that were normally the case in the pre-globalization era when state-controls on investment dominated.

HCCB bought 34.64 acres of land primarily used for agriculture, in Plachimada. In December 1999, the district health authority of Palakkad district provided the approval for the plant based on certain conditions. One of the conditions was that the bottling plant had to establish an appropriate waste disposal mechanism. According to the local government rules in India, the license to run industries in Kerala must be obtained from the local governing body, the Panchayat. In early 2000, the local Panchayat of Perumatty granted permission to HCCB to operate a 2800 Horsepower electric pump to take ground water out the earth. The water was to be used to produce Coca Cola's popular brands, and the operations started in March 2000.[234] At the time, the plant employed 70 "permanent" workers and about 150 people categorized as "casual" labor – the unskilled workers hired to work in the plant, often through labor contractors, who earn their wages on a daily basis. A report said that the plant operated with its own captive electricity generating set, and did not draw electricity from the common grid. The report says further: "It is also reportedly not having (sic) a plot registration number as the land was converted from paddy lands. Hence the very existence of the bottling plant has an illegality to it."[235] The

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[234] Haritha Bhoomi (A bi-monthly magazine for environmental awareness), (December 24 2005).

[235] A report titled "The Adverse Environmental Impact of the Hindustan Coca Cola Beverages Pvt. Lt. located in the Plachimada Area in Perumatty Panchayat in the Chittur Taluk of the Palakkad district' by the Trivandrum chapter of Indian National Trust for Arts and Cultural Heritage (INTACH).

reader should note here that patterns of land use has been a serious issue in Kerala which has high density of population.

Pollution and Depletion of Ground Water in Plachimada

Newspapers have reported that the solid waste generated in the production process started to be distributed among the local farmers from as far back as April, 2000[236] – a month after the operations started. The farmers were told that the solid waste worked as good manure in place of the more expensive fertilizers they had to buy for cultivation purposes. Accordingly, farmers were happy and they started getting truck loads of the solid waste deposited in their farmlands, both in and around Plachimada. While in some instances farmers were given the solid waste free of cost, in other instances they had to buy it, but at a cheaper price than they normally paid for fertilizers.[237] Tests conducted later confirmed the presence, above permissible limits, of toxic heavy metals like cadmium and lead in the water in Plachimada.

Meanwhile, the local people started to experience scarcity of potable water, and they had to walk as far as a few kilometers in search of drinking water. In practical terms, this meant that they had to make a choice between work and water. An interviewee stated, "When we went looking for water, we would often spend more than half a day doing it and we would lose that day's work. On the other hand, if we went for work, then we would have no water when we got back in the evening." [വെള്ളം തേടാന് പല്പ്പോഴും പകുതിദിവസങ്ങളില് കൂടുതല് എടുക്കും. അപ്പോള് അന്നത്തെ ജോലി പോകും. മറിച്ച്, ജോലിക്ക് പോയാല് വൈകുന്നേരം വരുമ്പോള് വെള്ളമില്ല.] Often all the members of families,

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[236] Haritha Bhoomi.

[237] Ibid.

including women and children, would trek kilometers to look for a well with clean water. While this was becoming a practice within the community, not many people outside had heard about the problem. Around this time, a teacher in a local school found that the students from Plachimada village were not attending school for days at a time. The teacher, upon making enquiries, found that the students' lack of attendance was connected to the scarcity of potable water in the area – they would often accompany their parents in looking for potable water. In early 2001, the teacher conducted a preliminary study of water scarcity as a social problem in Plachimada and presented his study in a meeting of the local chapter of National Green Corps, a voluntary association of environmental activists.

Some of the early reports pointed in the direction of pollution and depletion of ground water in the area. A report pointed out: "The continuous heavy withdrawal of ground water in the Plant site has already adversely affected the water table. Water availability in the open wells and shallow bore wells over an extensive area has drastically fallen."[238] Wells were starting to dry up! Simultaneously, people started experiencing salinity and hardness in the ground water, thereby making water in the wells unpotable. The report pointed out that this may have been caused by excessive groundwater withdrawal, because "minerals from deep soil layers could be moving to the upper layers and contaminating the water."[239] The report also said that two forms of waste disposal in the plant were problematic. According to the report, "Partially processed waste water from the Plant [was] continually sprayed on the lawn and garden being raised within the factory compound. This [was] percolating down and reaching the

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[238] INTACH report

[239] Ibid.

water table."[240] This process led people to suspect ground water contamination. The report attributed the bitter taste of water to high levels of salinity and the presence of calcium salts that added to the hardness of water.

Meanwhile, the general shortage of water started affecting people at multiple levels – agriculture was affected and laborers found it difficult to find jobs. On the other hand, there were increasing instances of health problems related to water. The brackish water was becoming unusable for cooking, thus causing various illnesses among people, including various types of stomach disorders. When boiled and subsequently cooled, the water would develop an "intense milky" color, which gradually would precipitate a whitish substance.[241] Those who had a shower in this water reported experiencing intense itching continuously for hours together. Women who were employed as "casual" laborers to spray the partially treated water in the lawns in the plant experienced strong skin reactions, such as "developing dark pigmentation" around the palm and feet.

The report points to the sludge (solid waste), generated as part of the production process in the plant, as potentially causing water contamination. The report says: "The solid waste is composed partially of dried sedimented slurry which is a yellowish white granulated substance with a faint sulphuric acid smell. There is also a foul smelling hard dark gritty stuff mixed with fibres, pieces of fabric, synthetic insulating material etc."[242] This is the material that the farmers were led to believe was fertilizer, as mentioned above. The sludge would produce an intensely foul order, particularly at night that would cause violent reactions among people, particularly pregnant women, the aged, and

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[240] Ibid.

[241] Ibid.

[242] Ibid.

children. Report says that "In the irrigated coconut groves, the waste materials have got spread around through the irrigation canals over a large area and is seeping into the soil contaminating soil, water and air."[243] Farm laborers, exposed to this, reported acute rashes and skin deformities around ankles. During field work, many respondents and other local people reported that large quantities of the sludge were taken out of the plant premises everyday in trucks and deposited on open land, including on the banks of large irrigation canals.

While this was going on, the production process in the HCCB plant was uninterrupted continually by the water shortage in the area. It has been reported that 85 truck loads of beverage products "containing 550-600 cases each with each case containing 24 bottles of 300 ml capacity left the factory premises daily."[244] HCCB had dug six bore-wells and these along with the two open wells that were already there provided sources of water required for the manufacturing process. Reports say that altogether 0.8 to 1.5 million liters of water was sucked out everyday.[245]

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[243] Ibid.

[244] Bijoy, "Kerala's Plachimada Struggle: A Narrative on Water and Governance Rights."

[245] Haritha Bhoomi.

The Plachimada Anti-Coca Cola Movement Takes Off

The people of Plachimada responded to these experiences by organizing sporadic protests throughout 2001. The main issue that these protests sought to address was the question of the pollution of ground water. One of the initial main demands that the protestors put forward at this stage was that HCCB should provide clean and potable water to the local residents. During one such protest demonstration, the local political leadership intervened on behalf of the people and conducted negotiations with the management of the HCCB plant. The protest demonstration was called off after the management of the HCCB plant agreed to provide clean drinking water to the local people. One of the respondents in the study pointed to this as a crucial characteristic regarding the role of the local politicians, which was manifested more clearly as the movement developed further. An "established" political practice has been that when there is a dispute in an area, the local politicians intervene, purportedly on behalf of the aggrieved "population" and claim the right to negotiate, with the assumption that people cannot represent themselves and need this assistance. Here too, when the local people sought to address a social problem, the local political leaders of various political parties tend to intervene and assure everyone that their "problem" will be "solved." In practice, these interventions have the effect of dispersing an emerging movement and often do not genuinely address the social problem.

HCCB failed to honor the agreement that it would provide a source of clean water.[246] Although a bore-well was dug in Plachimada, it failed to bring potable water. Meanwhile, the shortage of water became acutely felt by the people. They approached the labor contractor who was supplying daily wage laborers to the plant, demanding that they

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[246] Haritha Bhoomi.

be given jobs, if not clean water. According to several respondents in the study, the recruitment, even for low paying jobs in the plant, was on the basis of allegiance to the trade unions that are affiliated with established political parties. The political parties and their trade unions tend to look after the welfare of those who are affiliated with them. As a result of negotiations, 18 women from Plachimada were later employed as "casual laborers."

Providing momentum to the activism, thus leading to the formal declaration of a movement in Plachimada, were studies conducted by independent groups regarding the pollution of ground water. One study concluded that partially treated water, as part of the effluents generated during the production process, may have been disposed of on the premises of the plant.[247] Another study was conducted at the behest of Corpwatch, an agency that investigates and exposes corporate violations of human rights, environmental crimes, fraud, and corruption around the world.[248] Samples of water were collected from two wells in Plachimada – one, a common well and another owned by a farmer – in March, 2002 and analysis was performed in a laboratory in Chennai, India. The reports of the analysis were sent to Mark Chernaik, Staff Scientist, Environmental Law Alliance Worldwide (E-LAW U.S.) that reveal the "water from the Panchayat well contains very high levels of 'hardness' and salinity that would render water from this source unfit for human consumption, domestic use (bathing and washing), and for irrigation."[249]

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[247] INTACH report

[248] www.corpwatch.org

[249] Report by Chernaik in a compilation of reports on the ground water pollution in Plachimada put together by Plachimada Study Committee

Hardness is a chemical term for the sum of the concentrations of calcium and magnesium ions in water. According to Chernaik, "Water from the village (Panchayat) well and the farmer's well would be classified as 'very hard'." Likewise, the sample of water from the Panchayat (common) well had high levels of Total Dissolved Solids (TDS) and salinity. Consumption of such water, although not presenting any "adverse health effects," would have an "objectionable taste" because of the presence of calcium and magnesium. The report also concluded that the "water from Panchayat well would not be suitable for irrigation unless used to irrigate salt-tolerant crops growing on soils with adequate drainage".[250] Chernaik further pointed out that the analysis confirms his hypothesis that the "rapid extraction of water from the aquifer (after the arrival of the Coca-Cola bottling plant) would increase the rate at which water is flowing through the limestone or clay. Faster flowing water would break apart some of the limestone or clay, resulting in the addition of limestone or clay particles to the water supply."[251] These reports led to the realization among the local people that the HCCB plant is detrimental to their very existence, let alone bring about development in the region.

As the news of the pollution induced water scarcity in Plachimada spread, several activist groups started extending solidarity to the people. One of them, an organization called Resistance, organized a protest demonstration against imperialism in front of the HCCB on April 13, 2002 and accused Coca Cola of being an agent of imperialism. Following this, three organizations that were in the leadership of the emerging movement

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[250] Ibid.

[251] Ibid.

at its inception – Adivasi Samrakshana Sangham (ASS)[252], People's Union for Civil Liberties in India (PUCL) and Haritha Development Association (HDA) – served a notice to HCCB that said if the issue of ground water pollution was not resolved soon, they would initiate an indefinite struggle against the operation of the plant in Plachimada. After their attempts at bringing about a dialogue between the management of the plant and the people of Plachimada to discuss the issue of ground water pollution failed, several meetings were convened to bring together the affected people and launch a movement.

On April 22, 2002, the Anti-Cola movement under the aegis of ASS, HDA, and PUCL was inaugurated by C.K. Janu, who had emerged as a leader of tribal people in Kerala through her struggle to secure their land rights. Two main demands were put forward at the inaugural meeting of the Plachimada movement: (1) Close down the HCCB bottling plant in Plachimada, and (2) compensate the local population for the losses they suffered because of ground water pollution. Reports say that more than 2000 people, many of them tribal men and women, participated in the inaugural meeting. The inauguration of the movement saw several prominent people extending solidarity to the Plachimada movement. Some of them included those who had earlier taken part in the Gandhi-led, anti-colonial movement. It was largely decided that the movement would follow the method of Satyagraha, a non-violent form of struggle based on adherence to truth and civil disobedience.[253] Calls were also made to give up the use of Colas all over India.

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[252] Adivasi Samrakshana Sangham translates to Committee for the Protection of Tribal People.
[253] Satyagraha was a unique form of philosophy and struggle practiced by Gandhi. The Sanskrit word literally translates as "desire or pursuit of truth". As a philosophy and practice of non-violence resistance,

After the movement took off, the management of the plant refused to allow 18 local women, who were working in the plant under the labor contract system, into the plant for partaking in the inaugural meeting. They were later told that they would be allowed to go back to work if they agreed that the HCCB plant was not responsible for the ground water pollution. Faced with unemployment and loss of income, they agreed that the plant was not responsible for ground water pollution and were duly allowed back to work.[254] Meanwhile, the General Manager of HCCB filed a law suit against those in the leadership of the movement at the High Court of Kerala. The law suit stated that the individuals in the leadership of the movement were responsible for building a temporary struggle arena about 10-15 meters from the front gate of the HCCB plant, used for engaging in "anti-social" activities such as shouting slogans, and preventing the laborers from entering. The law suit argued that the protestors are a nuisance that prevents the smooth functioning of the plant, and demanded that the temporary structure called the struggle arena be removed and the demonstrators evacuated.

In response to this, the movement leaders filed a counter petition in the High Court of Kerala that argued that the movement addressing was peacefully the legitimate demands of the locals, including the marginalized tribal people. However, parallel to all this, the plant management was also trying to reach a negotiated compromise with the movement.[255] Clearly, right from the start, the movement was burdened with having to deal with the legal system, which clearly influenced its direction and all decisions. According to many respondents, the movement had to marshal scarce resources to meet

this form of struggle, particularly in the form of non-violent civil disobedience, had rallied people as part of the anti-colonial movement against the British in India.

[254] Haritha Bhoomi.
[255] Ibid.; this was corroborated during interviews also.

the legal challenge, in contrast to the readily available resources of Coke, one of the most prominent brands in the world. However, the "carrot and stick" policy of legal notice, followed by invitation to negotiations, did not seem to work as the movement organizers stuck to their demands, which HCCB was unwilling to meet.

The Initial Phase of the Plachimada Movement

After the movement took off, the participants got together and formed the Anti-Cola Struggle Committee (henceforth, Struggle Committee) to coordinate the protest. But like most struggles of marginalized people, the movement did not gather the attention of the mainstream media in the first phase, which lasted about 50 days. At this stage, the organizers sought to increase its visibility in the public sphere as a part of developing the movement further.

During this phase of the struggle, most of the mainstream political parties and their leaders were opposed to or ignored the movement. Among the political leaders who ignored the struggle was the representative of Chittoor area (of which Plachimada is a part) in the Kerala legislative assembly, who, as their representative, was expected to address this problem. As often happens with "development" imposed from above, a small section of the local population stands to gain while the rest lose in many ways.[256] It has been pointed out in numerous studies on neoliberalism that the small section that often gains is the local elite – in terms of caste, class, gender etc. – who have access to

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[256] Development in India has seen the strengthening of the position of the dominant classes such as the merchants and industrialists in the city and the landed elites in the rural areas. Rao, Towards Understanding Semi-Feudal Semi-Colonial Society.

established structures of power.[257] In parts of Third World like Kerala, for instance, one of the surest ways to discredit a local movement of affected people is to brand them as "anti-development." Indeed, political leaders thought that the movement was 'anti-development', and thus it was largely ignored by the mainstream media.

The respondents who were active in the movement at this phase confirmed, during their interviews, the newspaper reports that apart from taking out water through the bore-wells dug on the premises of the plant, HCCB also started buying water from individuals in villages around Plachimada.[258] A report says that bore wells were dug on the properties of rich land holders in the nearby villages, and the water was transported into the plant in tankers. Water was bought at the rate of Rs. 400 for a truck load that carried up to 12,000 liters of water. Also alleged was that leaders of prominent political parties in the region were among the beneficiaries.

A stated reason for the general opposition to the movement was that foreign direct investment by companies, such as HCCB, would help produce employment opportunities for people. Also expected was that the plant's operation would increase the economic activity around the area and bring about capitalist development. However, because the landless agricultural laborers and poor peasants in Plachimada were not getting employed in the plant, the development, if any, was limited to certain sectors. The rich land holders who made money by selling water to the plant, for example was one of those

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[257] Alfredo Saad-Filho, Deborah Johnston, Neoliberalism: A Critical Reader. (Ann Arbor, MI: Pluto Press, 2005).

[258] Madhyamam, a daily newspaper in Malayalam (May 05, 2002).

beneficiaries. Whether this investment was directed to agriculture is an altogether different question.[259]

After the inauguration of the movement in April, the momentum was sustained throughout the subsequent months through regular protest demonstrations. Meanwhile, many different organizations of marginalized and oppressed castes in Kerala extended support to the movement. One of the ways to keep the movement alive was by ensuring that there were groups of people always sitting in the struggle arena in front of the plant. Apart from that, activities would intensify when these organizations extending support to the movement came forward to hold a public meeting or a protest demonstration. Often, with a view to spreading the message of the Plachimada movement far and wide, the movement participants would walk kilometers together in a procession that culminated in a public meeting.

Meanwhile, however, agencies of the state – particularly the police – mounted pressure on the people of Plachimada to disband the movement. Several respondents and newspaper reports cite instances of the local police officers manhandling the movement organizers and misbehaving, especially with the women participants, and randomly arresting those in the leadership of the movement.[260] Several attempts at tearing down the temporarily constructed struggle arena were also reported during this time.

After a month of the inauguration of the movement, the Struggle Committee called for a meeting of all political parties and other organizations working in the area to discuss the problem. Consistent with their approach to the movement at this stage, the mainstream parties – Indian National Congress (INC), the party leading the ruling

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[259] Haritha Bhoomi.

[260] Haritha Bhoomi; corroborated by interviews.

combine in Kerala at that time, Communist Party of India (Marxist), popularly known as CPM which was the main opposition party in Kerala, Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) that was leading the federal government in India, and Janata Dal, a social democratic party with a considerable presence in Palakkad district – ignored the invitation. However, many other civil society organizations, NGOs, non-mainstream political parties and activist groups, such as People's Union for Civil Liberties (PUCL), Atheists Association, Students' Islamic Organization, Struggle (Porattam), National Farmers' Association, Organization of Poor Peasants and Landless laborers, Socialist Unity Center of India (SUCI), Palakkad Munnot, and Front for the Protection of Scheduled Caste and Scheduled Tribes, participated in the meeting. These developments ensured right from the start that the movement remained outside of the mainstream political system, although it had to interact with traditional political organizations.

As the movement developed, a counter-offensive was initiated by the workers in the plant – in the form of the Labor Protection Committee (LPC) – who were threatened with the possibility of losing their employment, in the event that plant was forced to shut down. With better resources at this stage, the LPC started regularly holding public meetings to counter the claims of the movement. According to some of the respondents who were part of the movement, the rhetoric of those in this "counter movement" often crossed the boundaries of logical arguments and political polemics and made veiled and often direct threats. Since the employees of the plant included sympathizers and members of most of the mainstream political parties in Kerala, the counter-movement managed to enlist their support also. As happens often in many such movements, rumors started to

spread that sought to discredit an opponent.[261] One of these was that the movement organizers sought money to disband the movement. Such rumors were later denied by the movement organizers.

Meanwhile, the movement sought to grow through the medium of posters and pamphlets, and by organizing street corner meetings. The participants also used the campaigns to spread the word about the movement, and as an opportunity to raise important resources for sustaining the movement such as money and food. However, attacks on the movement grew from many sides. The State, using its police force, continued to clamp down on the movement participants, by forcibly taking them away from the struggle arena and keeping them under arrest without valid reasons. The movement participants believe that such moves by the police could not have been possible without the active connivance of the local leadership of influential political parties.

In early June, 2002, an organization of artists based in a village nearby organized a public debate to address whether the Cola plants that operated in Palakkad are good or bad for the society.[262] Given that the movement had struggled thus far, this debate was significant in clarifying the reasons for the movement to a larger audience in Palakkad district. Some of the important topics of the debate were: (1) is the HCBPL plant responsible for the scarcity of water that the people of Plachimada have been experiencing? (2) Are the multinational corporations the leaders of development or are they exploiters? (3) Does development through multinational corporations use the labor

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[261] Many interviewees pointed this out.

[262] Haritha Bhoomi.

power of people or does it exploit the workers? (4) Did the HCBPL plant contribute to the improving the living conditions of the poor people of Plachimada or did it further endanger them? (5) Is the waste produced by the plant and deposited in the farmlands harmful? (6) Is the waste generated by the HCBPL plant contributing to the pollution of ground water in Plachimada?[263]

Consistent with the trend, the representatives of the state and political parties did not attend the function. The civil society organizations that had participated in the debate extended support to the movement, and called for strengthening it by increasing the level of popular participation. The leaders of the Struggle Committee articulated the position of the movement with regard to these questions, whereas the opposition disputed the claims and emphasized that foreign direct investment helps provide gainful employment.

The Struggle Committee leaders explained the level of social, environmental, and cultural impacts of the plant. They emphasized that rights to basic requirements for human existence, such as air, water, land and local resources belong to the local people and that such A commons should not be exploited by multinational capital. They reiterated the goals of the movement – shutting down the plant and forcing HCCB to compensate those who suffered losses. In an attempted move to be inclusive, the Struggle Committee leaders called for compensating not only the local people, but the employees of the plant.

In response to this debate, the counter-movement organized a public meeting in front of the plant in Plachimada, where representatives from all the mainstream political parties participated and openly declared their support to the employees of the plant and their opposition to the movement. Representatives of the political parties across the

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[263] Ibid.

spectrum – from the right to the left – declared that they were against "globalization," but that they were against shutting down a plant that provided needed employment. In order to protect the HCCB plant, they argued that no chemical effluent was being disposed of from the plant and that, because of the functioning of the plant, the ground water in the area was not polluted.

Civil Society Extends Support: Formation of Solidarity Committee

The movement entered a second phase around the first week of June, 2002. Until then, the movement was primarily focused on spreading the word about the problem in Plachimada to other parts of the Palakkad district through campaigns, marches, demonstrations, pamphleteering, and public debates. By the end of the first phase, the state and its institutions at multiple levels – the government at the state level, the local governing body or Panchayat, the police, and a majority of the mainstream political parties – remained opposed to the meeting. At this stage most of the energy of the movement had to be directed to thwarting the growing violence against it through police interventions, avoiding law suits, and preventing violence from those who commanded immense power within feudal set-up in Palakkad.[264] Most of the mainstream media organizations largely had ignored the movement. However, popular support for the movement was starting to grow, and the increasing support of civil society groups and social and environmental activists was starting to place the social problem in Plachimada in the public sphere in Kerala.

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[264] Ibid.

Cashing in on these factors, on June 7, 2002, the Struggle Committee organized a protest march – widely attended by the men and women of Plachimada – to the office of the local governing body, the Panchayat of Perumatty which governs Plachimada. Although the decision to invite Coca Cola to invest in Plachimada was taken by the State government, the move towards "decentralization" of governance in India had invested the local governing bodies with powers of jurisdiction within the respective localities.[265] Accordingly, the license to operate the plant in Plachimada was granted to HCCB by the Panchayat of Perumatty. As in most cases in India, people often tend to look on these institutions and officials of the state as corrupt. The women in the protest march carried with them brooms, and upon reaching the local governing body's office, they threw the brooms at the door, symbolically "cleaning up" what they perceived as a corrupt institution. This was followed by a public meeting where the speakers were vehemently critical of the silence of the Panchayat to the problems of the people. This move was crucial on the part of the movement organizers, for the subsequent developments led to the Panchayat being forced to throw its weight behind the movement.

The march to the Panchayat office was followed quickly by the formation of the Solidarity Committee that set off the second phase of the movement. In the first phase, the movement participants had sought to tap into the existing network of social activists, voluntary associations in civil society, environmentalists, and rights organizations that work in different parts of Kerala. The early activities were limited to informing the fellow activists in different parts of Kerala of the nature and development of the movement. Some leaders of People's Union for Civil Liberties (PUCL), an organization that

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[265] The decentralization of governance experiment in India was called 'Panchayati Raj' or rule by Panchayats.

champions people's rights, were working for the rights of tribal people in Palakkad. They were active in leadership roles in the Plachimada movement from the beginning. These leaders used their access to the civil society network in Kerala, and brought together in Plachimada on June 9 a group of over 25 activists associated with environment and civil society movements from different parts of Kerala.

The expression of solidarity by these activists provided buoyancy to the movement. The speeches made during the public meeting emphasized the role of the local institutions of the state, the political parties, and the elites in ensuring the continued functioning of the plant against the wishes of the marginalized people of Plachimada. They used the excitement generated by this occasion to show collective strength, as well as to rebuff the claim earlier made that the waste deposited in farmlands contained no toxic substance. The movement participants marched in a procession to the farmlands and collected the stinking solid waste that was disposed of there, and put it in front of the plant. This action was followed by sloganeering and protest demonstrations.

Amid the large scale mobilization of people, a large posse of police officers and constables were lined up to protect the plant from any possible attack. As mentioned earlier, the police as the long arm of the law in a partly feudal society such as Plachimada, interferes constantly in the lives of people, often without justification. As the demonstrations wore on, a local police officer reportedly beat up the driver of the vehicle that the civil society activists were using.[266] He went on to arrest the driver and impound the vehicle. This led to the demonstrators becoming restive, and while the exchange of words continued between the demonstrators and the police, the latter attempted to tear

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[266] Haritha Bhoomi; Corroborated by interviewees.

down the struggle arena. The demonstrators responded by encircling the struggle arena and preventing the police from bringing it down. They went on to block the road as a response to police brutalities. Eventually, about 200 of the demonstrators were arrested and removed to the local police station.[267] Media reports said that the police resorted to excessive force, particularly on the tribal women.[268] As a result, seven of these women were later admitted to hospitals with serious physical injuries. Among those arrested were the civil society activists. This perceived high handedness from the police led to widespread condemnation and increased support for Plachimada movement all across Kerala. While the mainstream media had until then kept away from reporting on protest activities, the involvement and arrest of the civil society leaders made news.

The incidents of June 9 were followed by a meeting organized in a nearby town to express solidarity with Plachimada movement. This meeting of largely civil society activists resulted in the formation of a committee that extended solidarity to the Plachimada movement (Solidarity Committee) and helped to coordinate its expansion to a broader scale. While the problem that the movement was trying to address had a specifically local character, many debates within the movement early on had alerted the participants to the possibility that the local problem in Plachimada had to be understood as part of global processes. The presence of many left groups in the socio-political landscape of Kerala had contributed to the prevalence of a discourse that equated globalization with the imperialism of transnational capital.

The Solidarity Committee tried to integrate the Plachimada movement with those raising similar issues in other parts of Kerala, and mobilize support from the public

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[267] Ibid.

[268] Ibid.

sphere. In the initial stages, the Solidarity Committee had four conveners who coordinated its efforts and also worked together with the leadership of the Struggle Committee. Although the key personnel of the solidarity committee changed periodically, the leadership was largely comprised of leaders from civil society, those with experience in social movements, environmentalists, and some political parties that were sympathetic to this struggle. Very important, from then on, the leadership of the Struggle Committee and Solidarity Committee started coordinating with each other in terms of making decisions about the direction of the movement.

Apart from a sudden spurt in activity that led to the formation of the Solidarity Committee, the "routine activities" continued at the primary site of the movement in Plachimada. The counter-movement initiated by the employees of HCCB continued to make claims against the Struggle Committee. On the other hand, the movement intensified with protest marches, with demonstrations becoming a regular fare. A new element was that many different organizations started to come forward to support the movement. Often this support was manifest in the form of organizing a rally, a protest march, or a demonstration or public meeting in the struggle arena.

On the other hand, the interventions by the police, often violent, continued unabated. Many respondents reported during interviews their suspicion that the police officers, often viewed as corrupt, may have been getting favors from the plant management, which explained their animosity to the movement. Inquiries made at a local restaurant in Plachimada during fieldwork revealed that the plant management paid for the food of the posse of policemen who were posted constantly near the struggle arena. While the police highhandedness towards the movement participants continued, such

atrocities now started to make the news and invited widespread condemnation, along with the active support of rights groups and other civil society organizations.

Debates within the Plachimada Movement

Many fringe radical-left groups that are not part of the mainstream political landscape of Kerala had extended support to the movement from the initial stages. Their presence had intensified the debates about the nature and purpose of the movement. A section of activists and organizations thought that the movement had to be linked to the mainstream political processes in Kerala, by seeking to win over the political parties and obtain state support. On the other hand, others thought of the problem in Plachimada as an imperialist creation, made possible with the support of the state. In such a scenario, they thought that negotiating with the political establishment is futile, unless the movement can bring about serious changes in the state.

According to these radicals, the establishment of the plant in Plachimada is consistent with the tendency of imperialist capitalism and multinational companies to exploit the natural resources in the Third World, thereby posing grave threats to the very existence of communities. These leftist groups insisted on viewing the movement as part of the larger struggle against imperialism and its exploitative tendencies. Some of the respondents reported that these debates were not resolved, nor carried on after the leftists ceased to be active participants in the movement.

In the initial stages, the movement was known as a movement of tribal people. However, debates within the movement led to it become more inclusive, because several other people living in Plachimada, including some land owners, farmers, non-tribal

agricultural laborers, and other local residents, were also affected by the problem of ground water pollution. This realization led to the formation of a more inclusive Struggle Committee early on. However, even when the movement grew and ceased to be comprised exclusively of tribal people, most of the "foot soldiers" of the movement were these people who lived in Plachimada. In this context, activists in the Plachimada movement, who had been associated with mobilization of tribal people in Kerala, believed that the problem was not merely related to environmental concerns, but also the oppression that tribal communities have been experiencing within the Kerala society.

There were also debates about the very purpose of the movement. The movement began with the stated intention of addressing the problem of ground water pollution. Therefore, the aim was to shut down the plant, because it was the polluter, and get the owners of the plant to pay compensation to those who suffered losses. The recent history of mobilization of the tribal people in Kerala, against the state and the oppressive tendencies within the mainstream society, had worked as a spur – particularly in the role of the Adivasi Samrakshana Sangham (ASS) in the movement. However, as the movement advanced, such views were largely ignored and all efforts came to be focused increasingly on closing down the plant with the support of the state.

In its early stages, the Struggle Committee was more or less a homogenous group of people, many of whom had a prior history of working together on issues related to the welfare and marginalization of tribal people. However, with the advancement of the movement, the personnel associated with everyday activities also became more diversified. As mentioned earlier, one of the ways in which the movement progressed was through different organizations expressing solidarity and support by taking

responsibility for conducting programs and activities – protest demonstrations, street corner meetings, marches, and public meetings – to keep the momentum going on a daily basis. If an organization contributes consistently to the running of the movement, it would often have a greater voice compared to others. Many respondents reported during interviews that the movement witnessed a struggle for hegemony among different organizations at various stages. Such internal struggles, although not very overt at this stage, often took the form of excluding others from activities. For instance, in August 2002, two conveners of the Struggle Committee resigned from their positions after they were not informed of a public rally at the local Panchayat office. Interestingly, in the meetings that followed to consider the resignations, one was accepted while the other was rejected.[269]

The Plachimada Movement Wins Large Scale Support

With the increasing visibility of the Plachimada movement many studies were conducted on the reported problem of ground water pollution and depletion.[270] Most of the studies conducted by independent agencies and civil society organizations confirmed the pollution of ground water in Plachimada. With their publication, there was a groundswell in popular support, and soon some of the political parties and their leaders changed their position vis-a-vis the Plachimada movement. On the other hand, HCCB commissioned studies to look into the alleged ground water pollution.

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[269] Haritha Bhoomi.

[270] Organizations such as INTACH, Jananeethi, and Yuvajana Vedi conducted studies on the water problem in Plachimada. The district medical officer of Palakkad, the local Primary Health Center (PHC), and Central Ground Water Board of India also conducted studies. Reports of these studies are available in a compilation by Plachimada Pathana Samithi (Plachimada Study Group), which is a joint effort of the Plachimada Anti-Coca Cola Struggle Committee and Plachimada Solidarity Committee.

A significant turn around came with the publication of the findings of another crucial study.[271] John Waite, a news presenter from the BBC Radio 4 program "Face the Facts", had visited Plachimada after learning about the environmental issues emerging from the disposal of sludge in farmlands, and collected samples. The samples were analyzed in a laboratory at the University of Exeter. According to the analysis, the samples of sludge contained dangerous levels of the toxic and carcinogenic chemical cadmium and lead.[272] The program also reported the opinion of poison experts that "cadmium can accumulate in kidneys and may lead to kidney failure. Lead is particularly dangerous to children and the results of exposure can be fatal. Even at low levels it can cause mental retardation and severe anemia."[273] After the report went on air, the movement started getting a lot of support from people from different parts of the world, particularly those engaged in similar movements against corporate giants in various other countries.

Another incident that helped the cause of the movement was when, in June 2003, an independent research organization called Center for Science and Environment (CSE) in New Delhi conducted a study, and found that different cola products contained more than acceptable limits of pesticides.[274] This discovery led to a widespread debate, all over India, about how good consumption of colas is for health.

Meanwhile, the mainstream newspapers started reporting increasingly on the Plachimada movement. Two significant developments were: (1) the movement started

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[271] BBC Radio 4 aired a report that pointed to the presence of cadmium in Plachimada's ground water.

[272] www.countercurrents.org

[273] Ibid.

[274] Haritha Bhoomi.

capturing the popular imagination of the poorer and marginalized people all over the state. And (2) many youth groups in several parts of Kerala expressed solidarity with the movement through campaigns against Coca cola – mostly non-violently but sometimes resorting to force. For instance, in November 2002, as an expression of solidarity with the Plachimada movement, a youth organization that is part of the anti-imperialist campaign destroyed Coca Cola bottles after capturing a warehouse in Calicut in Kerala. Such actions would intensify gradually all over the state in the subsequent months.[275]

With widespread protests against colas and expressions of solidarity with the movement, the mainstream political parties that were, until then, opposed to the movement started rethinking their position. Late in November, the leader of opposition in the Kerala Legislative Assembly expressed support to the Plachimada movement. Another influential leader of the National Alliance for People's Movement (NAPM) and Indian Socialist Front visited the struggle arena in Plachimada in December, 2002. The Plachimada movement was hailed as a people's effort to resist the attempts of global capitalists to commodify drinking water, and thereby render this resource inaccessible to poor people. On the other hand, Coca Cola enlisted the support of leaders of other political parties.[276]

The State's attitude towards the movement was until then characterized by animosity or indifference. However, with the popular opinion changing in favor of the movement, now pressure was on the state to intervene in what was seen as a legitimate problem of marginalized people. On the other hand, powerful interests within the state

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[275] Ibid.

[276] Ibid.

sought to prevent such an intervention. As a result of the movement's activities, the State Legislative Assembly's Committee on Environmental Affairs was appointed to assess the situation in Plachimada. The plant management reportedly told the Committee that the plant extracted 600 kilo liters of ground water everyday for production purposes.[277] On the contrary, the movement organizers believe that the actual use of water in the plant was much greater. After gathering evidence, the Committee concluded that the extraction of 600,000 liters amounted to overexploitation of ground water, and if this was allowed to continue, the water table may be lowered and drought conditions produced in the near future. However, although the movement had tried to emphasize the health and environmental issues arising from pollution, apart from the depletion of ground water the Committee refused to look any further. The Committee that visited the plant in Plachimada did not care to consult the local people who had to bear the brunt of the pollution. At the end of the study, the Committee concluded that there was a need for a "scientific study" by a renowned agency on the level of exploitation of ground water by the cola plants in Palakkad.[278]

In early 2003, after the State started looking into the charge that level of ground water extracted by the plant was above acceptable limits, HCCB started buying water from the big land owners in the villages around Plachimada. Reports say that about 50

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[277] Plachimada Samaram Pathravarthakaliloode: Samaharanam (The Plachimada Movement through Media Reports: Compilation) compiled by Haritha Development Association.

[278] Ibid.

tankers, with a carrying capacity of about 12000 liters each, were bringing in at least 600,000 liters of water into the plant everyday.[279]

After the initial phase of slow development and the second phase of gaining widespread support all over Kerala, the movement entered a decisive third phase in January, 2003. During this stage, the Plachimada movement established links with people's struggles going on in other parts of India and the rest of the world. With the swell in public support, the local governing body was compelled to extend support to the movement and take decisive action that lead to the closing down of the plant.

Around this time, Medha Patkar, a popular leader associated with many struggles of marginalized people, extended her support to the Plachimada movement. A movement led by Patkar, called Narmada Bachao Andolan (NBA), had been championing the rights of people displaced by the State initiated building of big dams on Narmada River. Several such movements that came together to form National Alliance for People's Movements (NAPM) had been leading anti-imperialist struggles all over India. On January 26, India's Republic Day, NAPM organized a rally across India led by Medha Patkar. The main slogan of the rally was "save the nation, build the nation", while opposing the twin dangers of Hindu fundamentalism and imperialist globalization. The rally took off from Plachimada, which was portrayed as a model struggle against the appropriation of natural resources that belonged to local communities by monopoly capitalists. The emphasis was that the movement in Plachimada is built on the understanding that the resources – earth, forests, water and air – belong to local people, and the intention of the rally was to spread this idea to other parts of India. The inauguration of the rally was a large meeting

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[279] Kerala Kaumudi (A Malayalam Newspaper) in Plachimada Samaram Pathravarthakaliloode: Samaharanam (The Plachimada Movement through Media Reports: Compilation) compiled by Haritha Development Association.

attended by civil society leaders, activists that are part of similar movements in other countries, and some leaders of political parties from different parts of India. During the meeting, the leaders poured cola on a symbolic coffin of Coca Cola. The people, together, declared the move to abjure the use of Colas.[280] The rally then proceeded to travel to different parts of Kerala and other states in India, and subsequently the movement became increasingly popular. The approach of the media also changed decisively, with the movement starting to make the headlines both in Kerala and all over India.

The success of the rally put the political parties in confusion. Until then, they had taken a strong stance against the movement. Often the local leaders of mainstream political parties were trying to browbeat the movement participants into submission. The Left Democratic Front (LDF) that ruled Kerala, when Coca Cola was given permission to establish plant in Plachimada, was now in the opposition. With this massive shift in public opinion, its leaders had to support the movement. However, they were asked uncomfortable questions regarding them bending the rules to provide concessions to the cola companies, to which they did not have satisfactory answers. Many of the respondents in the study, during interviews claimed this to be a moral and tactical victory of the movement.

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[280] Haritha Bhoomi.

The Panchayat Supports the Plachimada Movement

With the movement strengthening and gathering widespread support, the local Village Panchayat came on board and decided to support the movement. This change was preceded by a turn-around in the approach of some of the mainstream political parties that were influential in the Village Panchayat. At this stage, a section of the civil society organizations took the lead in organizing struggles at Plachimada, but also sought to negotiate with the political parties to win their support. Around this time, the decision-making powers within the movement largely rested with the leadership of the Solidarity Committee and a small section of the heads of the Struggle Committee. However, the main thrust of activity at this stage was negotiating with the political leaders and seeking to lobby with the state to support the movement. At the same time, the movement became increasingly entangled in a legal battle with HCCB.

By the end of March, 2003, the license to operate the plant granted to HCCB by the local Panchayat had expired and was up for renewal. Under pressure from the Plachimada movement, the Panchayat decided not renew the license, particularly in the wake of many allegations against the plant flouting environmental and other norms.[281] Instead, the Panchayat decided to serve a "show cause" notice that required the HCCB to explain why the plant should not be shut down, given its poor environment record and other problems. However, despite the refusal to renew the license, the plant continued to operate. Meanwhile, government officials questioned a local leader of a prominent political party for selling ground water taken from his property to the HCCB plant. Additionally, there was large scale mobilization of people across various civil society

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[281] Mathrubhumi (a daily newspaper in Malayalam), (April 8, 2003).

activist groups as well as political parties, many of whom felt compelled to support the movement ever since the rise in public support.

In response to this "show cause" notice, the plant management filed a suit in the High Court of Kerala. In the petition, the HCCB leaders stated that being a company with a global presence, they have devised environmental norms for units operating in all countries. These norms relate to economizing the use of water, improving the management of water resources, and protecting the environment. HCCB argued that based on these norms, 30 million Indian Rupees were spent to establish an Effluent Treatment Plant (ETP) within the plant premises, and the water treated in ETP is used for the maintenance of a garden on the premises. The petition also pointed out the results of two studies – one conducted by the Groundwater department of Kerala and the other by R.N. Athavale, Emeritus Professor at National Geophysical Research Institute of India – to show that there is not enough evidence to link the pollution of water in Plachimada to the functioning of the HCCB plant.[282] On the directions of the High Court, HCCB then petitioned Kerala's Local Self Government Department (LSGD), which coordinates the decentralization of governance, to get the Panchayat to renew the license to operate.

As the legal battle waged on, the plant continued to function. The Struggle Committee decided to erect a blockade against the operation of the plant and called on the State to recognize this action. The movement participants pledged that they would continue to struggle until the plant was closed down. Many tribal men, women, and children laid themselves down in front of the plant and were later forcibly removed by the police. Two weeks later, the High Court ruled that HCCB should respond to the show

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[282] Plachimada Samaram Pathravarthakaliloode: Samaharanam.

cause notice issued by the Panchayat, and that the latter should make a decision after due consideration.

National Alliance for People's Movements (NAPM) 'Takes Over' the Movement

Public meetings and protest demonstrations, with a view to strengthening the movement, were organized to mark the first anniversary of the movement on World Earth Day (April 22), 2003. Vandana Shiva, a renowned environmentalist in India, was the main speaker. Shiva argued that the commodification of natural resources and water is in tune with new imperialism spreading all over the world.[283] The new economic policies of the government have helped the privatization of natural resources and aided the exploitation of these for the benefit of monopoly capitalists. She urged the movement participants to reorient their struggles to thwart these tendencies and called for a boycott of transnational companies. She also emphasized the need for coordination between such struggles going on around the country, and called on the movement participants in Plachimada to join this grand protest.

In late April, the National Alliance for People's Movements (NAPM) decided to take over the movement.[284] The idea of "take over" is a form of sponsorship whereby an established political party, a civil society organization, or a conglomerate of social movements intervenes to support an emerging movement. Generally, such support is not merely external but often provides "sponsorship" to a movement. In Kerala, many movements and struggles initiated at the local level by people have to interact with the

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[283] Madhyamam (April 22, 2003)

[284] Haritha Bhoomi.

established political parties – often the mainstream leftist parties. If the purposes and activities of a given protest do not clash with their interest and represent a popular cause, then the apparatus of these parties consider the possibility of sponsoring the movement. In this relationship between the sponsor and the movement, the sponsor is powerful enough to decide on the direction of a protest. Often such take over or sponsorship has great implications for the democratic content of the movement. The decision of NAPM to take over the struggle was supported by the leadership of the Struggle Committee of the movement. This aspect of the movement will be further analyzed in the later chapters.

In early May of 2003, the Primary Health Center (PHC) of the village reported that the water in three wells around the plant is not fit for consumption.[285] Meanwhile, the plant management responded to the show cause notice, whereby the Panchayat invited the representatives of HCBPL to present their case. Eventually, after consideration of all these, the Panchayat decided not to renew the license to operate the plant. HCBPL approached the High Court again and the latter asked HCBPL to place an appeal before the Secretary of Kerala's Local Self Government Department. The Court also decreed that the Secretary should find a solution within a month of submitting the appeal. Upon this directive, the plant shut down temporarily and HCBPL went on appeal. Meanwhile, the State Government of Kerala overruled the Panchayat action and the license was not renewed.

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[285] Ibid.

Negotiations with the Agencies of the State

The Kerala state government convened a meeting to consider the viewpoints of the two parties – the Panchayat and HCCB. Against the arguments of HCCB stated above, the Panchayat argued that its officials had visited Plachimada and were convinced that the ground water is polluted. They also argued that the District Medical Officer reported that the ground water was polluted and not fit for consumption.[286] However, the state government did not accept the arguments of the Panchayat on the grounds that while it was ready to accept that pollution and depletion of ground water has happened in Plachimada, there was not sufficient evidence to show that the situation was caused by the plant. The government ruled that the Panchayat should appoint a committee, including experts from the Groundwater department of Kerala, the Pollution Control Board (PCB), and the Health department, to conduct a study of the ground water situation in Plachimada. The committee was to present its report in three months, and based on these recommendations the Panchayat would decide on HCCB's request for a renewal of its license. Panchayat is part of the state apparatus in India, albeit at the local level. In a way, the main focus of the struggle now was within the state – specifically between the Panchayat and the higher echelons of the state. The result was that the activities of the movement increasingly became geared towards lobbying with the Panchayat to act on its behalf.[287]

Marking heightened activity related to the movement, the Solidarity Committee organized a march to Kerala's Legislative Assembly in Trivandrum, the state capital of

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[286] Haritha Bhoomi.

[287] Ibid.

Kerala. Many public intellectuals joined the march, and asked the State to desist from selling away natural resources of the land and give the control of local resources back to the communities. With the groundswell of support for the movement, the discourse of anti-imperialism and the need to resist monopoly control over resources became well entrenched in the public sphere of Kerala. In many public meetings, the model of development followed in India was criticized as being in the interest of the ruling class, and ignoring the lot of the poor and marginalized. Efforts were also made to understand the problem in Plachimada as part of global processes, and therefore calls were made to promote interaction between Plachimada and other people's struggles around the world. Following this, Solidarity Committees were set up in different districts of Kerala and the leaders of the Struggle Committee traveled extensively in different parts of Kerala to explain the reasons and the objectives of the struggle to people.

The Pollution Control Board (PCB) of Kerala, which had been commissioned to conduct a study of the ground water pollution problem in Plachimada, wrote to HCCB and mentioned that the sludge contained 201.8 mg/kg of cadmium. The PCB also called on HCCB to take immediate measures for the effective disposal of solid waste.[288] In response, HCCB placed advertisements in popular newspapers claiming that Coca Cola made in India is safe and is no different from that consumed globally.[289] Meanwhile, in response to these developments, the employees of the Plachimada plant organized demonstrations demanding job security. On the basis of the finding that the plant did not meet the required environmental norms, the PCB later revoked the authorization previously given to HCCB to operate the plant.

[288] Ibid.

[289] Ibid.

In September, a meeting of the village council in Plachimada reiterated its demand to the State that moves should be made to close down the HCCB plant and provide compensation to those who suffered losses because of the plant's operation. Around the same time, the local community of tribal people also held a meeting and demanded the closure of the plant. Meanwhile, the Panchayat served a new notice to the plant that asked the management to explain why the plant should not be closed.

Following the "show cause" notice served on the plant, the elected members of the Panchayat had a one day fast in the struggle arena, and denounced the state government for ignoring their decision not to renew the license to operate the plant. In support of the members of the Panchayat, the Struggle Committee organized rallies and demonstrations. The Solidarity Committee conducted a people's solidarity convention and extended support to the movement, while identifying it not merely as a struggle for drinking water but against economic and cultural imperialism. During this time, several leaders of similar movements going on all over India visited the struggle arena and expressed solidarity with the movement. Many organizations from Kerala conducted protests and asked the state government to implement the decision of the Panchayat not to renew the license and shut down the plant.

As a response to the popular agitation, the Kerala government made a decision on HCCB's appeal against the show cause notice. The government's committee said that the Panchayat did not undertake a scientific study before serving show cause notice, and therefore could not prove that the depletion of ground water in Plachimada was caused by the overexploitation by the plant. The committee directed the Panchayat to undertake

such a study in the next three months, and asked that the plant be allowed to operate until then.

The Panchayat went back in appeal to the High Court on the grounds that the ruling by the Kerala government amounted to anti-democratic interference in the right to local self-governance of people through the Panchayat. It also further argued that conducting such a study would bring an unnecessary financial burden on the Panchayat. A single judge heard the petition and declared that ground water is common property resource. The judgment said that if one person or a company is allowed to overexploit this resource, other claimants will also have the right to exploit it as they please, thus drying out of the deep aquifers. The Court ordered that the plant be allowed to take out ground water for its use for the following month, after which the management will have to look for other sources of water for its production purposes.

The Plachimada Movement and the WSF

In January 2004, a meeting of the World Social Forum (WSF) was held in Mumbai, India. This was an occasion for several different movements against the exploitation of water by colas to come together. The Struggle Committee of the Plachimada movement, along with similar movements going on in other parts of India, organized rallies and demonstration as part of the WSF meeting. The several similar movements across the world, such as NAPM of India, the Colombian Anti-Cola Joint Network, and the Colombia Solidarity Campaign, extended solidarity to the Plachimada movement at this stage. This meeting also brought together the leadership of these different groups in Mumbai.

Following the WSF, between January 21 and 23, 2004, the "World Water Conference" was organized in Plachimada.[290] The Water Conference was attended by about 60 representatives from different countries. At the end of the conference, a resolution asserted that being a common resource, the right to manage water should be reside with local communities, and private corporations should not be allowed to appropriate or exploit it at their will. The resolution also demanded that multinational cola companies such as Pepsi and Coca Cola should leave India. Representatives of the people's health movements, in different parts of Latin America and the United States, visited the struggle arena and extended their support. All of these factors contributed to a sense of buoyancy and optimism within the movement.

Meanwhile, activists associated with the movement turned more militant. They formed groups, including women and children, which seized the trucks that carried water HCCB bought from individuals around Palakkad and forcibly threw it back into the fields.[291] As the movement was starting to attract attention globally, particularly after the WSF meeting, HCCB responded by enlisting the support of several "prominent citizens," including former judges in the Supreme Court of India and former scientists in a bid to legitimize its activities.

Despite these developments, the distance between those in leadership roles, decision-making positions, and the common people of Plachimada was starting to increase. Interactions within the movement, at several levels of leadership, were starting to decrease. Many respondents in this study pointed out that with the growth of the movement and its visibility, democratic decision-making within the movement was

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[290] Madhyamam (January 24, 2004).

[291] Haritha Bhoomi.

starting to suffer. At this stage, challenges were posed to the leadership from certain sections of the movement, particularly the Solidarity committee. However, instead of addressing these issues in a democratic spirit of cooperation, they were largely ignored and treated as distractions from the main aim of the movement. Equally important, around this time is when the role of the state and political parties became more significant. In the early part of 2004, anticipating a relatively poor monsoon season and impending drought conditions, the Kerala government decided to temporarily shut down the plant.

The activities in the Plachimada movement between 2004 and 2006 were largely characterized by a shift in focus from local mobilization, and efforts at collective empowerment, to engaging in legal battles and efforts to win over the state and its agencies. On the other hand, local protests and demonstrations continued, albeit at a reduced level when compared to earlier times. The different sections and organizations associated with the movement continued to work without much close coordination, as they sought an elaborate vision of politics to inform the activities of the struggle.

The immediate aim of the movement came to be seen as closing down the HCCB plant. This focus resulted in a long legal battle whereby, initially, the Court ruled that water was common property. Thus the court ruled against subjecting water to the designs of profit accumulation. However, HCCB petitioned against this decision and the Court set up another "Division Bench" to hear the case. The Division Bench ruled in favor of letting HCCB open the plant and operate. The Panchayat was ordered to grant a license for the plant. However, the Panchayat stipulated stringent conditions while granting the license, one of which included that the plant could not use ground water from within the

limits of Perumatty Panchayat for industrial purposes. Meanwhile, the order of the High Court led to large scale mobilizations in Plachimada. At the same time, the movement leaders had lobbied the Kerala government to declare Perumatty Panchayat as one of the areas experiencing "over-exploitation" of water. This demand imposed strict limits on the ways water from this area could be used. Given all events, along with the large scale mobilization of public opinion against Coca Cola in Kerala, the plant that had been temporarily shut down never opened.

With the plant closed, the level of activism in the movement further decreased. A legal battle is now going on in the Supreme Court of India. Although time and again questions are raised about getting HCCB to compensate persons for the losses suffered in Plachimada, no significant efforts have been made in this direction. Further, there was disappointment about the inability of the Plachimada movement to address seriously the question of pollution of the ground water. In the legal battles, the main issue of contention regarded ground water depletion because of its over-exploitation. The transition from being a local struggle to becoming a renowned social movement was occasioned by the increased role of civil society in the Plachimada movement. The key question emerging from this transition is: Did civil society play a leading role in taking these protests in the direction of counter-hegemonic collective action?

CHAPTER 5

Methods

There is a widespread belief that civil society has the potential to address the problems faced by oppressed and marginalized communities in the context of globalization. Against this background, this exploratory study aims to understand the world-view that informs the practices of civil society agents, as they emerged in the leadership positions in a protest movement started by local communities against the social problems they faced.

In order to unravel this aspect of civil society, this study employed qualitative methods, in particular exploratory field work inspired by symbolic interactionists and phenomenologists such as Herbert Blumer[292] and Alfred Schutz.[293] Accordingly, 30 in-depth interviews were conducted during the course of three months of field work between May and August 2006 in Kerala, India. Aside from the interviews, supplementary observational material was gathered on the social movement and community life in Plachimada, in addition to the civil society agents in different parts of Kerala. Further, archival material on Plachimada movement was consulted that includes compilations of newspaper reports on the movement during the various stages of its development, studies conducted by various agencies and organizations on the problem of the depletion and pollution of ground water in Plachimada, and legal documents prepared by the representatives of Plachimada movement as part of the legal battle against Hindustan Coca-Cola Beverages Private Limited (HCCB).

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[292] Herbert Blumer, <u>Symbolic Interactionism: Perspective and Method,</u> (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1986).

[293] Alfred Schutz, <u>Collected Papers, Vol. I. The Problem of Social Reality</u>, (edited by Maurice Natanson), (The Hague, Netherlands: M. Nijhoff, 1966).

As mentioned in Chapter 1, the thrust of this study is to understand the role of civil society in the so-called Plachimada movement, particularly the nature of the worldview adopted by the activists. But more specific, is the politics of these activists of the movement counter-hegemonic or conservative and within the *status quo*? And following on this point, is the civil society that is operative capable of making the social transformations that the oppressed communities and others seem to desire? These questions get to the heart of the current debates about the role of civil society in contemporary anti-globalization movements, such as that undertaken in Plachimada. The thrust of this investigation, however, is to grasp how these activists define themselves and their actions.

Social Theory and Methodology

The history of sociology has witnessed debates between proponents of two approaches to social research. The two positions have been referred to as "naturwissenschaften" (or N- Position) and "geisteswissenschaften" (G-Position). The N-position understands social research as resembling 'natural sciences,' while the G-position sees social scientific activity as interpretive research.[294] The N-position assumes that the social world works in ways similar to nature and can be understood by identifying the universal laws. Following this premise, advocates of the N- position adopted the methodological position of natural sciences based on positivism and its many derivations.

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[294] John A. Hughes, Wesley W. Sharrock, The Philosophy of Social Research, (New York: Longman, 1997).

As a result, research inspired by N-position is driven by principles of formalization and standardization, and relies heavily on technology that minimizes the influence of subjectivity and contributes to establishing objectivity. In social scientific research, quantitative methods are seen as best representing these principles. The point is to discover "facts" that are treated as empirical; that is, they are autonomous and divorced from interaction and interpretation.

The Geisteswissenschaften, on the other hand, are built on a critique of the N-position, particularly the dualism that is at the core of positivism. Instead of treating reality as existing *sui generis*, persons are acknowledged to be fundamentally engaged in the social construction of reality. Facts, therefore, are not understood as universal and removed from their contexts; rather, the differentiation between fact and value is obliterated. Accordingly, facts that are embedded in language should be understood as intrinsically linked to human experience. In the G-position, the emphasis of social inquiry shifts from identifying facts to understanding "meaning." But meaning is viewed to be fundamentally tied to human action. The traditions following the G-position, accordingly, understand social research to be engaged in understanding the experiential character of reality. Particularly important, the qualitative methods inspired by the G-position emphasize the human element in research by establishing dialogue with the social context that is rich in meaning.[295] Through observation and interviewing, for example, the researcher is brought closer to the social context studied.

In a nutshell, the two positions discussed above approach social research from vastly divergent perspectives. The traditions of research inspired by the N-position

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[295] Max Weber, Economy and Society (Translated by E. Fischoff et al.), (Berkeley, Calif.: University of California Press, 1978).

emphasize fact over value and objectivity over "subjectivity." Such emphasis is expected to lead to the production of accurate knowledge. Clearly, as seen in Durkheim's view of facts and society,[296] such conceptions are fundamentally based in dualism. On the other hand, the G-position emphasizes "experience." For example, as Laing points out, "Social phenomenology is the science of my own and of others' experience."[297] Therefore, social reality is not to be understood as "fixed," but as relational and processual, at the core of which are the lived experiences of people. Therefore, as Holstein and Gubrium indicate, in order to gain a picture of social reality that stays true to its content, people should not be treated as merely "vessels of answers."[298] Instead, social research has to be a dialogic process.

The Study Design

Initial Preparation:

According to Rubin and Rubin, the first step in qualitative design "involves choosing a topic."[299] After the initial few months when the media largely ignored the Plachimada movement, by early 2003 some of these organizations had started to report on these protests. Being interested in the social changes brought about by globalization, I had started reading about the movement and kept track of its developments. In 2005, I visited India with a view to identifying a research area as part of my doctoral dissertation

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[296] Emile Durkheim, <u>The Rules of Sociological Method</u> (Ed. G. Caitlin), (New York: Free Press, 1966).

[297] R.D. Laing, <u>The Politics of Experience</u>, (New York: Pantheon Books, 1967), p.5

[298] James A. Holstein, Jaber F. Gubrium, <u>The Active Interview</u>, (Thousand Oaks, Calif.: Sage Publications, 1995).

[299] Herbert J. Rubin, Irene S. Rubin, <u>Qualitative Interviewing: The Art of Hearing Data</u>, (Thousand Oaks, London, New Delhi: Sage Publications, 2005), p. 39.

project. After following several developments in India through the news media, and conversations with experts in various fields, I became interested in understanding how globalization was experienced by people and how they responded to this phenomenon. Most important was that the discourse of civil society was portrayed as instrumental to globalization and social change.

At this stage, Plachimada movement had become a central issue of discussion in Kerala, with newspapers and electronic media closely following and reporting on its daily developments, particularly the legal cases. I followed these reports closely and spoke to those who had reported on the social movement there, with a view to gathering initial information that could help me formulate a research proposal to study the social movement in Plachimada. Following the suggestions of Rubin and Rubin, I developed an initial research question[300] from the broader topic: Is civil society capable of addressing the social problems of people and bringing about the kind of social change that they want? If not, why?

Following the formulation of the research question, Rubin and Rubin suggest that the next step in a qualitative design is to determine whether the topic is suitable for qualitative interviewing. According to them, qualitative interviewing is compatible with research that seeks to bring out "nuance and subtlety."[301] In this research, the emphasis is on examining closely the processes of the Plachimada movement in order to understand the nuances of the operation of civil society. In early 2006, I formulated my research proposal and went back to Kerala to do field work. Prior to travelling to Kerala, through the journalists who had reported on the movement, I had established contact with a

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[300] Ibid.

[301] Ibid., p. 47

movement activist who agreed graciously to introduce me to other activists who were participating in Plachimada movement. The intention of the study was to understand the processes operative within the movement, particularly the role of civil society. Given that the social movement articulated a counter-hegemonic narrative and posed questions on the nature of liberal democracy particularly in the context of globalization, I was keen to discover whether the actors/agents who were part of the movement sought to democratize social relations and activities within the movement.

I scheduled my field research trip of close to three months between May 20, 2006, when I travelled to Kerala, and August 16, 2006 when I returned to Miami, Florida. After reaching Kerala, I contacted the movement activist who had agreed to introduce me to other persons associated with the movement. He gave me contact information of several other activists, many of whom later consented to be participants in the research study. I adopted a snowball sampling procedure to gather data based on the experiences of these activists in the Plachimada movement.[302] After meeting with this activist, I scheduled several trips to Plachimada. During these trips I spent several days in Plachimada, talking to several people and gathering first hand information about the protests. Aside from these informal dialogues with several people, many agreed to partake in interviews. Several interviews were conducted in Plachimada and parts of Palakkad district. However, many activists associated with the movement were located in different parts of Kerala, and I traveled extensively throughout the state in order to meet and interview these persons.

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[302] John W. Creswell, <u>Research Design: Qualitative, Quantitative and Mixed Methods Approaches,</u> (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, 2003).

While the initial contact person provided entrée into the field, interacting with a wide range of persons associated with the movement provided a vast array of information and insights. Many a times during these interactions with the Plachimada activists, I was given contact information of other persons associated with the movement, thus providing me with access to the network of activists associated with Plachimada. These interactions informed the sampling procedure adopted. In the end, the sample for this study was drawn from a pool of activists through a combination of snowball and purposive sampling procedures.[303] Based on the suggestions of Rubin and Rubin[304], I selected an initial set of participants while keeping in mind three criteria – their association with Plachimada movement, willingness to talk, and diversity. In all, thirty (30) activists were interviewed, of which four were women. These activists were associated with the Plachimada movement at different levels of the organization – ranging from the local activists, who initiated the movement, to the civil society leaders from different parts of the state who eventually played important roles in defining the direction of the movement. Among these interviewees, ten (10) were local residents, including both tribal and non-tribal people, and the rest of the interviewees (20) were "non-local" civil society activists from different parts of Kerala who supported the movement. The local residents belong primarily to the working class, mostly agricultural laborers. The non-local activists included working class and middle class people, including some professionals. The question of diversity was accounted for by the fact that people with different group affiliations, and diverse backgrounds, had participated in the movement.

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[303] Ibid.

[304] Rubin and Rubin, Qualitative Interviewing.

The movement was started by the local people with the help of local organizations and associations. However, in course of time, the movement captured popular imagination in Kerala and attracted several "sympathizers," particularly from among civil society groups. Through conversations with these activists, for the purposes of this study, "civil society agents/activists" was defined as those who were part of various voluntary associations, including NGOs, religious groups, women's groups, educationalists, developmentalists, environmentalists, youth associations, public intellectuals, and students' groups. Some of them emerged in leadership positions within the movement, particularly in the Solidarity Committee of the movement. They are referred to as "civil society leaders" in the study. Although political parties do not come strictly under the term civil society, members of some political parties in Kerala had supported the Plachimada movement. On the other hand, the movement had to interact with organized political parties, many of which were opposed to the movement initially and came on board later. Therefore, in the first case, the individuals affiliated with political parties, but who interacted closely with civil society as part of the movement, are considered part of the civil society for the purposes of this study. But, in the second case, political parties and their leaders acting on their behalf are identified as such. Additionally, the local community members who were activists in the movement are identified as "community activists" or "local activists," and the leaders among them are identified as "community leaders" or "local leaders."

Data Gathering:

After the initial meeting with the contact person who provided the contact details of several other activists, I contacted some of them by phone, and some others directly in Plachimada and around the Palakkad district of Kerala, and requested their participation in this study. The procedure was described to them in detail – the study entailed primarily conducting interviews with the movement activists and leaders, and the overall purpose of the study was explained. They were also informed in advance that if they chose to be part of the study, the interviews would require, on average, about one hour. They were also informed that they could refuse to participate in the study, and that even if they chose to participate they could terminate their participation at any time. The interviews were scheduled depending on the availability of respondents.

After establishing contact with the potential participants in the study, many of them started inviting me to events and meetings organized at various parts of Kerala, in connection with Plachimada movement and other movements going on in that region. As I started to attend these meetings, I was introduced to more activists and became familiar with many of these persons. This process helped me to broaden the sample, while keeping in mind the question of diversity as it relates to their experiences as part of the movement, and some relevant demographic indicators such as tribal/non-tribal, local/non-local, and gender.

Familiarity also helped develop a level of trust, which was important to establish conversations during the interviews. On the other hand, this involvement also helped in

the process of snowball sampling,[305] since the activists with whom I had established initial contact could suggest other participants.

As part of the field work, I conducted 30 interviews, each ranging from 35 minutes to 150 minutes. All except one of the interviews were conducted in Malayalam, the native language of the interviewer and interviewees. One interviewee preferred to speak in English. The interviews were conducted at places where the interviewees felt most comfortable, such as homes of the interviewees and coffee shops. All of the interviews were audio-taped, and notes were taken during the course of the interviews, while trying to ensure that writing did not interrupt the conversational flow. As the interviews followed the format of a conversation, there was ample time for the clarification of ideas and themes. At the time of the interviews, informed consent forms in Malayalam and English were distributed to the interviewees.

The interviews were based on Holstein and Gubrium's[306] suggestions for "active interviewing." Accordingly, I introduced myself and spoke briefly about the purpose of my study at the beginning of each interview. This brief speech did not necessarily follow a particular pattern; a prepared text was not read. In other words, with every interview, observation, and even casual conversation, my understanding of the field and, by extension, the problem of the study was evolving. In fact, not reading a prepared text seemed to put the participants at ease and prepared them to participate in the dialogue and address the questions raised.

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[305] John W. Creswell, <u>Research Design</u>.

[306] Holstein and Gubrium, <u>The Active Interview.</u>

Following Rubin and Rubin, these interview participants were viewed as "conversational partners." According to them, a conversational partner has "the advantage of emphasizing the active role of the interviewee in shaping the discussion and in guiding what paths the research should take."[307] An initial set of questions were formulated that served as "conversational agenda" (Appendix I). These questions were framed in broad terms, in order to encourage the participants to think aloud about their experiences in the movement. The idea was to keep the conversations flexible, not following any rigid pattern, so that the interviewer and interviewee were comfortable with each other. Clearly spelling out that I was seeking a conversation, rather than treating them as standard interviewees, provided an environment where they could freely talk about their experiences as part of the protests.

Rubin and Rubin emphasize maintaining confidentiality and respecting the interviewees as part of the ethical responsibilities of the researcher toward the conversational partner. According to them, respect entails being clear about the aims and benefits of the interview, not deceiving them, and above all, treating them politely.[308] During the interviewees, as part of building conversational partnerships, all these were observed with utmost care.

Blumer suggests that qualitative research should follow 'sensitizing methodology'.[309] According to Blumer, this entails establishing direct contact with the field and understanding this domain through direct observation and conversation. Blumer also emphasizes that the qualitative researcher should seek to understand the various

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[307] Rubin and Rubin, Qualitative Interviewing, p.14.

[308] Ibid., p.97-100.

[309] Blumer, Symbolic Interactionism.

dimensions of the world being studied in all its diversity. Blumer's key point is that flexibility is central to any successful research project where the respondents are actually engaged. The researcher, accordingly, should not begin an interview, for example, with preconceived schemes. Instead, a true interview, or conversation, is reflexive, whereby the various assumptions that are operative are examined, so that the experiential world of the interviewee might be entered. Following Blumer's advice, the aim was to achieve some "empathetic understanding" during these interviews.

Data Analysis:

The time spent in the field also helped consolidate important themes used to analyze the social movement. Prior to writing the dissertation, I transcribed the interviews from the audio-tapes. As most of the interviews were in Malayalam, the process of transcribing also entailed translating these interviews into English. A close reading of the translated and transcribed interviews reinforced some of the themes identified earlier.

The data was organized, as part of the analysis, on the basis of the logic of abduction. Some of the themes of this analysis were based on prior reading of the globalization and civil society. But themes also emerged from a close analysis of the data. Therefore, a sort of interaction took place, referred to by Peirce as abduction.[310] Abduction is neither inductive nor deductive. Prior reading of the literature on social movements supplied a scheme for analyzing data. But contrary to deduction, this scheme is not imposed *a priori*. As a result of paying attention to the data, this initial scheme is modified to reflect the sentiments that are expressed by the respondents. This process of

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[310] Charles Sanders Peirce, <u>Collected Papers of Charles Sanders Peirce, Volume VII, Science and Philosophy</u> (Edited by Arthur W. Burks), (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1958).

interaction between data and scheme is two-way, and thus goes beyond both induction and deduction.

Specifically, close scrutiny of the interview data provided four broad themes that could be used to describe the world-view of civil society in Plachimada. These broad themes, on the other hand, corresponded with several aspects emphasized by four different approaches in social movement literature. These four broad themes that were adopted eventually to analyze the functioning of the social movement and the role of civil society therein are: (1) articulation of the problem, or how the social problem the movement confronted was defined by the activists; (2) the internal functioning of the organization and the nature of the leadership; (3) the question of what constituted resources and their availability; and (4) interaction with the state and political establishment.

These themes corresponded to the different theories in the existing social movement literature, which were evaluated critically in the second chapter: New Social Movements (NSM), Resource Mobilization (RM), and the Political Process model. As mentioned earlier, NSM theorists emphasize the processes involved in the collective definition of the problem that a movement addresses. The process of defining the problem in a social movement has also been addressed in the "Framing" literature. Both RM and NSM, in different ways, emphasized the importance of organization and the nature of leadership. The question of what constitutes resources, and how a movement seeks to mobilize these factors, has been addressed by RM and the political process model, in addition to how a social movement interacts with the political establishment.

The process of organizing data into this framework thus started with a close reading of the social movement literature. But these themes also emerged from the data and served to modify this original scheme. For instance, how the different sections within the movement – more particularly, the local activists and civil society leadership – perceived the social problem was crucial to the direction of the movement and the adopted policies. Questions of organizational structure and the nature of leadership corresponded to questions of internal democracy and the nature of participation, which interested many activists. Likewise, during the interviews the insight was gained that the pursuit of resources and interaction with the political establishment defined fundamentally the nature of the movement. Based on these emerging themes, the existing literature on social movements was critically engaged. As mentioned above, such an exercise could establish the correspondence between the emerging themes in the study and the existing literature on social movements, thereby leading to the development of a modified framework for the analysis. Such establishing of correspondence between the emerging themes and the existing literature on social movements helped ensure that an *a priori* framework was not employed in the analysis.

Limitations of this Study

Some of the limitations of case studies are applicable to this investigation. This study does not lend itself to generalization and calls for further research into social movements and the role of civil society before claims to generalizability can be made. This study could have been more comprehensive if there was an opportunity to spend more time in the field during which time it would be possible to build better rapport with

the interviewees. This would have helped to gather more data. Finally, the number of women interviewees in this study was less when compared to men. This was partly because many women let men talk in their place. A female interviewer may have helped in getting more interviews with women. However, in the absence of the funds required for such a comprehensive study, the time spent in the field had to be limited, along with hiring additional interviewers.

Summary

This chapter began with a consideration of how social theory informs the choice of methodology. Different epistemological frameworks, as seen in the N and G positions, were contrasted. And after discussing how a qualitative approach is pertinent to this research, the study design was outlined. As part of the study design, the initial preparation for the research, the methods and practices of data collection employed, and the rationale for the analytical schema, including the use of abductive logic, were presented.

CHAPTER 6

Analysis and Findings

An analysis of the participation of civil society in Plachimada movement is presented in this chapter. Part of the material for the analysis was collected through thirty 30 interviews with participants of Plachimada movement, including those from the local communities and those who were part of voluntary organizations (civil society) but became part of the movement or supported it. This analysis is also based partly on observations conducted during field work, conversations with local people in Plachimada, and archival material, in the form of newspaper articles and reports of several studies conducted by different agencies.

The broad research questions that guided this exploratory study pertain to the politics of civil society. Consistent with the earlier discussion of the liberal tradition, in this analysis civil society refers to individuals and organizations formed out of voluntary and local association of people who partake in social movements and other political initiatives aimed at social transformation. Most important, the civil society is differentiated from the community. Within the liberal framework, community[311] is understood in "third world contexts" as a collection of people whose associational life is governed by "traditional" forms of subjectivity. Following on this condition, civil society is constituted by members who have had the opportunity to break out of these traditional forms of subjectivity.

As mentioned in earlier chapters, in the context of globalization, many critics have proposed that civil society is the realm of collective human action aimed to counter

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[311] Partha Chatterjee uses the term 'political society' instead of community. See Chatterjee, "On civil and political societies in post-colonial democracies," pp. 131-146.

the interests of the state and market.[312] Thus, civil society is understood as the realm of social transformation and human emancipation. In point of fact, lately civil society has been, in both theory and practice, linked to social movements, particularly those struggling against neoliberal globalization. The primary research question that is sought to be answered in this study is: Is the politics of contemporary civil society in Plachimada counter-hegemonic? Following on this, a second question arises: Is the civil society capable of providing the leadership required in oppressed communities that seek social transformation?

In order to understand whether civil society's politics is counter-hegemonic in nature, what constitutes "counter-hegemony" has to be defined. Counter hegemonic politics is understood as primarily engaged in social criticism through reflexive action.[313] In this case, action is not to be understood as distinctly different from consciousness; instead consciousness is manifested in concrete practice – the material of consciousness is necessarily the stuff of social relations. Counter-hegemonic action thus seeks to question the "realities" that are often understood as ontologically "given," including "common sense" assumptions about how the world functions. However, the atomized individual is not the site of such counter-hegemonic action. Instead, participatory collective action, built through solidarities established through dialogic interaction, is at the core of counter-hegemonic social movements. Against this background, the politics of

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[312] Michael Hardt, Antonio Negri, Multitude: War and Democracy in the Age of Empire, (New York: Penguin Press, 2004).

[313] Several commentators have pointed in this direction. Some of them belonged to the 'Praxis' school in former Yugsolavia. In this study, the understanding of counter-hegemonic politics is primarily drawn from the work of Antonio Gramsci. See Gramsci, Prison Notebooks. See also, Teodros Kiros, Towards the Construction of a Theory of Political Action; Antonio Gramsci: Consciousness, Participation and Hegemony, (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 1985); Sue Golding, Gramsci's Democratic Theory: Contributions to a Post-Liberal Democracy, (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1992).

civil society will be explored through an analysis of the concrete processes that emerged as part of the Plachimada movement. Drawing on the recent advances in social movement literature, these processes are understood to constitute a "definition of the social problem as part of the social movement", "organization, leadership, and decision making processes within the movement", "resource mobilization and social capital as part of the movement", and "interaction of the social movement with state and the political establishment".[314] These aspects of Plachimada movement will be analyzed in separate sections in the rest of this chapter. In subjecting these elements to scrutiny, politics of civil society will be analyzed in the context of oppressed communities.

The Process of Defining the Social Problem in Plachimada Movement

An initial problem that often confronts an emerging social movement is the definition of the social problem it seeks to address. Recent theories of social movements have insisted that there is no simple correlation between the existence of injustice and the emergence of collective action against such issues. Given that participants in social movements are seen as active agents who seek to bring about change, the definition of the problem should be reached through discussion and debates among the activists. Yet, the

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[314] This framework is built on the basis of close scrutiny of the interview data matched with a critical reading of the existing literature on social movements. The main aim is to understand in what ways civil society in Plachimada influenced the processes within the movement, based on which the politics of civil society could be critically understood. In order to do that, however, the various aspects of the processes in the movement have to be clearly identified. Some of the main themes that emerged during interviews were related to how different sections in the movement, the community and civil society groups in particular, differed in understanding the problem. Other issues were related to the identifying and mobilizing the resources required for the movement, the question of internal democracy, particularly in the functioning of the leadership, and the structure of organizations. Finally, the actions of the state and the political establishment were revealed to have immense influence on the direction of the movement. Many of themes have been discussed in the existing literature on social movements. The review of literature undertaken towards building the framework, in Chapter 2, analyzed critically this literature. Reading the existing literature on the basis of these emergent themes led to the development of the framework. It is emphasized that what looks like a typology is not uncritically adopted from the social movement literature.

social location of activists – both individually and in groups – involved in the movement may influence their understanding and articulation of the problem. If a social movement works on democratic principles, the generation of debates among the different viewpoints is critical to arriving at a commonly acceptable definition of the problem.

Such definition of problems, often referred to as "frames" in social movement literature,[315] is important for not only providing meaning to collective action but also defining and redefining its direction and scope. Especially noteworthy is that the definition of the problem is not to be understood as a "stage" in the development of a movement. Instead, the definition of the problem is an ongoing process of reflexive collective action. In other words, activists may seek to define and redefine the social problem that they address throughout the course of the social movement. Collective action, thus, has the potential to construct ideology, understood as a world-view, and thereby unravel the hegemonic nature of the prevalent dominant ideology that the movement seeks to oppose. On the other hand, the analysis of hegemony occurs through concrete practices as part of the movement. The definition of the social problem and collective action influence each other mutually.

The point of this section is to analyze the processes through which the social problem in Plachimada was defined collectively, as part of the social movement, and how this activity contributed to defining the scope of collective action. Consistent with the purpose of understanding the work of civil society activists within Plachimada movement, the analysis will consider critically how the latter contributed to articulating of the social problem that the protest confronted. The idea is to understand the world-

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[315] Hank Johnston, John A. Noakes, Frames of Protest: Social Movements and the Framing Perspective, (Lanham, Maryland: Rowman and Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 2005).

view of the civil society activists that became part of the movement. The crucial question is whether the orientation and actions of the civil society actors were consistent with the aspirations of the local community in Plachimada and counter-hegemonic.

In the case of the Plachimada movement, the immediate problem facing the local residents – the pollution and depletion of ground water, allegedly due to the functioning of the HCCB plant there – was the "crisis point." However, on the other hand, many local community members stated during the field work that the social problems faced by the local community in Plachimada were more "systemic" than the immediate water crisis. When Kerala's government invited HCCB to set up a plant in Plachimada, the expectation among the local people was that they would get new jobs. After all, the rationale for rapid industrialization, with the aid of foreign capital, was that such a process would lead inevitably to the generation of new jobs.

Given that these new jobs would be in factories rather than agricultural fields, the local community thought that the changed situation would improve their standard of living. However, the local people came in for a rude shock as their claims for employment in the plant were dismissed during the initial days of the operation of the plant. Many respondents pointed out that, instead, supporters of political parties and trade unions, which themselves are affiliated with various political parties, were the beneficiaries of the limited jobs that were produced. Thus, a local respondent noted:

> After coke plant came here the political parties divided the jobs that were there in the factory among themselves – CITU, HMS, INTUC, BJP etc [all acronyms of trade unions and political parties]. They brought party sympathizers to work here. I am saying this objectively despite the fact that I myself support a political party... None of the jobs were available to the local people. The political leaders and the company management thought of the local people as mere fools. That was a reason for starting the struggle.

[കമ്പനി വന്നതിനുശേഷം ഇവിട്ടുള്ള ആരെയും പണിയ്ക്ക് എടുത്തില്ല. രാഷ്ട്രീയ പാർട്ടികളും ട്രേഡ് യൂണിയനുകളും ഫാക്ടറിയിലുള്ള ജോലികള് വീതം വച്ച് എടുത്തു. സിപിഎംന്റെ സിഐടിയു, ജനത ദളിന്റെ എച്ച് എം എസ്, കോണ്ഗ്രസ്സിന്റെ ഐഎൻറ്റിയൂസി മുതലായവര്. അവര് അവരുടെ ആൾക്കാരെ ഇവിടെ ജോലിക്ക് കൊണ്ടുവന്നു. ഞാന് ഒരു രാഷ്ട്രീയ പാർട്ടിയില് ഉണ്ടെങ്കിലും ഇതെല്ലാം സത്യസന്ധമായി പറയുവാണ്. ഇവിട്ടത്തെ ആൾക്കാർക്ക് ജോലിയൊന്നും കിട്ടിയില്ല. കമ്പനിയുടെ ആൾക്കാരും രാഷ്ട്രീയക്കാരും ഇവിട്ടത്തെ ആൾക്കാര് വിഡ്ഢികളാണെന്നു ധരിച്ചു. ആങ്ങിനെയാണ്സമരം തുടങ്ങാന് തീരുമാനിച്ചത്.]

The local people had initially made a collective demand that they also should be given jobs in the plant. Many respondents claimed that such demands fell on deaf ears. On the other hand, these respondents reported regular threats from the local political heavyweights, particularly using their "muscle men," to ensure that the local community did not persist with such demands. After persistent demands, however, some of the local community members, especially women, were employed by the labor contractor to work in low-end jobs in the plant. They reported that they were paid very low wages. One respondent from the local community stated that: "Later on they gave some people jobs – they appointed about eight people for janitorial kind of work. They were part of contracted labor. Such employees don't get much money." [പിന്നീട് അവര് കുറച്ച പേരെ ജോലിക്കെടുത്തു. എട്ട് പേരെ സ്വീപ്പര് മാതിരിയുള്ള ജോലിക്കായെടുത്ത്. കോണ്ട്രാക്ടര് വഴിയായിരുന്ന അവരുടെ ജോലി. അധികം കാശൊന്നും അവര്ക്ക് കിട്ടിയില്ല.]

After the movement became organized, these earlier demands of the local people were invoked to discredit the fledgling movement. According to a respondent who was in leadership position in the initial stages pointed out, "The local politicians said that the claim about water contamination was a mere charade. They spread the word that we were either trying to get jobs in the plant or money." [സ്ഥലത്തെ രാഷ്ട്രീയക്കാര് പറഞ്ഞുപരത്തി

വെള്ള പ്രശ്നമൊക്ക വെറുതെ കള്ളത്തരമാണെന്ന്. അവരെ സമ്പന്ധിച്ചിടത്തോളം ഞങ്ങളുടെ സമരം ഒന്നെങ്കില് കാശു വാങ്ങാനൊ അല്ലെങ്കില് കമ്പനിയില് ജോലികിട്ടാനൊ വേണ്ടിമാത്രമാണെന്നായിരുന്നു.] The local leaders of the movement, in its initial days, refuted this claim by arguing that they were not looking to be bought-off. On the other hand, they emphasized that given the plant functioned in the midst of their community, they had a legitimate right to at least demand work in this company.

The actual movement was instigated by the water crisis. The people of Plachimada used typically water fetched from open wells or bore-wells, thus making ground water a crucial component of their collective existence. Most initial articulations of the problem were on experiential lines, given that the people of Plachimada – the initial participants in the movement – found their everyday lives in crisis due to the lack of potable and usable water. Thus, a resident of Plachimada who became part of the movement charged that "After they started making cola, slowly we started experiencing water shortage". [കോള അടിക്കാന് തുടങ്ങിയതിനുശേഷം ഇവിടെ ഞങ്ങള് വെള്ള ക്ഷാമം അനുഭവിച്ചുതുടങ്ങി.] Although scarcity of water was the initial problem, soon they started to experience a more difficult crisis. The respondent said that,

> "Although things were getting difficult, we were managing with what we had. But about six months after Cola production started, we experienced a new difficulty: rice wouldn't boil in the water we fetched from these bore-wells and we weren't able to cook. But we kept trying and those that managed to cook and eat it, started experiencing intense stomach pain and other types of uneasiness. Many people experienced intense vomiting and would get extremely exhausted. Many became very sullen and weak and unable to work in the farm."

> [ഇവിടെ അധികമൊന്നുമില്ലെങ്കിലും ഉള്ളതുകൊണ്ട് ഞങ്ങള് കഴിഞ്ഞു. ധാരാളം ബുദ്ധിമുട്ടുണ്ടായിരുന്നു. പക്ഷെ, കോള അടിക്കാന് തുടങ്ങി ഏതാണ്ട് ആറുമാസത്തിനു ശേഷം ഇവിടെ പുതിയ പ്രശ്നമുണ്ടായി. ബോറ്വെല്ലില് നിന്നുള്ള വെള്ളത്തില് ചോറ് വേകുന്നില്ല.. ആഹാരം പാചകം ചെയ്യാന് പറ്റുന്നില്ല..

ആഹാരം പാചകം ചെയ്യാന്‍ പറ്റുന്നില്ല. എങ്കില്യം ഞങ്ങള്‍ ശ്രമിച്ചുകൊണ്ടെയിരുന്നു. അങ്ങനെ ഉണ്ടക്കിയ ആഹാരം കഴിച്ചവര്‍ക്കെല്ലാം അസുഖം പിടിപെട്ട. അസഹ്യമായ വയറ്റവേദനയും അത്രമാതിരിയുള്ള അസുഖങ്ങളം. പലരും ശര്‍ദ്ദിക്കാന്‍ തുടങ്ങി, നന്നായി ക്ഷീണിച്ച. ഇതെല്ലാം കാരണം ആള്‍ക്കാരെല്ലാം വളരെ ക്ഷീണിച്ച് ജോലിക്ക് പോകാന്‍ പറ്റാതെയായി.]

The crisis boiled over when children in a local kindergarten were taken ill after consuming food and water on the premises. Although initially the local people thought that the children fell ill because of the negligence of those who ran the kindergarten, they connected this sickness eventually to the prevailing water problem in Plachimada. At the same time, people started trekking to another village nearby to get clean drinking water, a practice that some respondents claimed lasted at least six months. During this time that the local people got together to find out the cause of water pollution.

Meanwhile, the sludge produced in the plant that was distributed in farmlands started causing an intense stench. Some studies conducted by volunteers from various organizations and independent research groups such as INTACH who had visited Plachimada and collected water samples, after hearing about the pollution problem, began to argue that the HCCB plant may be contributing to the pollution and depletion of ground water. Thus, in the initial stages, the Plachimada movement was defined as against the HCCB plant that was polluting and causing depletion of ground water. The initial concrete demand placed on the plant managers by the movement activists at the initial stage was that they be provided with clean water and remove the waste from the plant deposited in the nearby agricultural fields. According to a respondent who was among the leaders in the initial stage of the movement, "we also demanded that we should be informed of how much of waste was being produced, and what were the measures the plant was taking to dispose off the waste, and how dangerous it was to

people." [കമ്പനിയില് എത്രമാത്രം വേസ്റ്റ് ഉണ്ടാകുന്നുണ്ട്, കമ്പനിക്കാര് ഇതിനെ കളയാന്

എന്തെല്ലാം ചെയ്യുന്നുണ്ട്, അതില് എന്തൊക്കെയാണ് അടങ്ങിയിട്ടുള്ളത്, ഇതൊക്കെ എത്രമാത്രം

അപകടകരമാണ്, ഇങ്ങനെയുള്ള കാര്യങ്ങള് ഞങ്ങളെ അറിയിക്കണമെന്ന് ഒരു ഡിമാന്ഡ് വച്ചു.]

Apart from the immediate problem, the persistence of everyday experiences of oppression in the tribal areas of Palakkad contributed to the movement soon becoming a place where the general condition of society was discussed. Several of the initial activists, who belong to the local community, sought to gain inspiration from the buoyancy generated by the movement of tribal people in Kerala. A local community member said: "One of the inspirations for building up our own collectivity was the sustained strike and sit-in put up by the social movement of the tribal people in Kerala, led by C.K. Janu. That was an inspiration for us also."[316] [ജാനുവിന്റെ നേതൃത്വത്തില് സെക്രട്ടേറിയറ്റിനുമുന്പില് ആദിവാസികള് സമ്ഘടിപ്പിച്ച സമരം ഞങ്ങളെയും സമരം തുടങ്ങാന് പ്രേരിപ്പിച്ചു. അതൊരു പ്രചോദനമായിരുന്നു.] This insight led to the formation of Adivasi Samrakshana Sangham (ASS).[317] The initial momentum for the movement was provided by the activists associated with ASS and Haritha Development Association (HDA). Both of these locally based organizations were indigenous to the community – many of their activists were tribal people – and had been engaged in mobilizing tribal people against oppression by the higher castes, political parties, and agents of the state. They were supported by the work of some non-tribal people associated with People's Union for Civil Liberties (PUCL).

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[316] C.K. Janu led a popular agitation of tribal people in Kerala. Since she was not directly part of Plachimada movement, she was not a respondent.

[317] Translates to "Tribal Protection Society."

The dominant social classes in and around Plachimada did not take kindly to these efforts to mobilize tribal people against everyday forms of oppression. Such actions were seen as threat to the existence of the *status quo* within the mainstream society. In response, any mobilization often invited attacks from the upper castes, political parties, trade unions, and even the police. A respondent, who was actively involved in the initial leadership of the movement, claimed that during the field study that he and a few of his friends were severely beaten up in a market place by a group of about 40 people. Apart from the water problems in Plachimada, a similar attack on a tribal youth stirred the people and lead to the declaration of the Plachimada movement. Recounting the events leading up to the declaration of the movement, this respondent said:

> "A young tribal man was implicated in a false case and was beaten up by the police. This angered those of us in the community and ASS decided to take up the case. We started a march of about 500 people from the front gate of the Cola plant. In fact, that was the initial declaration of intent to put up a struggle against the plant. We saw the working of the plant and appropriation of water as a form of threat to our existence, the worst forms of which are seen in direct attacks by the police and others."

> [ഇവിടെ ആദിവാസി സമുദായത്തിലെ ഒരു ചെറുപ്പക്കാരനെ കള്ളക്കേസ്സില് കുടുക്കി പോലീസ് മര്ദ്ദിച്ചു. ഇത് സമുദായത്തിലെ ആള്ക്കാരെ വല്ലാതെ വേദനിപ്പിച്ചു. ആദിവാസി സംരക്ഷണ സംഘം ഈ കേസ് ഏറ്റെടുക്കാന് തീരുമാനിച്ചു.ഞങ്ങള് കോള കമ്പനിയുടെ ഗേറ്റിനുമുമ്പില് നിന്ന് ഏതാണ്ട് 500 ഓളം പേരുള്ള മാര്ച്ച് അടുത്തുള്ള പോലീസ് പോസ്റ്റിലേക്ക നടത്തി. വാസ്തവത്തില് അതായിരുന്ന സമരം ചെയ്യുനുള്ള ആദ്യത്തെ പ്രഖ്യാപനം. ഞങ്ങളെ സംബന്ധിച്ച് കൊക്ക കോളയുടെ പ്രവര്ത്തനം ഞങ്ങളുടെ നിലനില്പ്പിനെ ബധിക്കുമെന്നുറപ്പായിരുന്നു. ഇപ്പോളുള്ള വ്യവസ്ഥിതി തന്നെ ഞങ്ങളെ ജീവിക്കന് അനുവദിക്കുന്നില്ല. ഈ ചെറുപ്പക്കാരനെതിരെയ്ല്ല പോലീസ് അക്രമം തന്നെ അതിന്റെ നല്ല ഉദാഹരണം ആയിരുന്നു.]

On the other hand, some of the worst forms of caste based atrocities such as untouchability are reportedly practiced in the tribal regions in Kerala, including Plachimada. The same respondent reported:

"Let me tell you of one instance of how caste based oppression and discrimination work here. A tribal group called Chakkili is considered the lowest rung of the caste hierarchies here. There have been several instances of barbers refusing to cut their hair, instances of separate cups for them coffee shops and restaurants, barring their entry into temples etc. We took up such issues. This was a time when such issues were not addressed as part of the Plachimada movement, although we saw these forms of continuing oppression as connected. We felt that there was a need to take up such issues and build solidarities people experiencing different types of oppression, all of which, to us are part of the same processes."

[ജാതീയമായ വിവേചനവും അടിച്ചമർത്തലും ഇവിടെ എങ്ങിനെയാണ് നടക്കുന്നതെന്ന് പറയാം. ചക്കിലി എന്ന ഒരു സമുദായമുണ്ടിവിടെ. ജാതിവ്യവസ്ഥിതിയിൽ ഏറ്റവും പിന്നോക്കമുള്ള വിഭാഗമാണിവർ. ഇവിടെത്തന്നെയുള്ള മറ്റുജാതിക്കാര് ചായക്കടയില് ചക്കിലി വിഭാഗത്തിലെ ആള്ക്കാര്ക്ക് ചായയും കാപ്പിയും പ്രത്യേകം കപ്പില് ഇപ്പോഴും കൊടുക്കാറുണ്ട്. ചില ക്ഷവരക്കാര് ഇവരുടെ മുടി വെട്ടാന് വിസമ്മതിക്കാറുണ്ട്. അവരെ ചില ക്ഷേത്രങ്ങളില് കയറ്റാറില്ല. ഞങ്ങള് ഈ പ്രശ്നങ്ങള് ഏറ്റെടുത്തു. ഈ സമയം ഇമ്മാതിരിയുള്ള പ്രശ്നങ്ങള് പ്ലാച്ചിമട സമരക്കാര് ഏറ്റെടുക്കാന് വിസമ്മതിച്ചിരുന്നു. പക്ഷെ ഇതെല്ലാം സാമുദായികമായി പ്രധാനപ്പെട്ട പ്രശ്നങ്ങളാണ്. ഞങ്ങളെ സംബന്ധിച്ച് ഈ പ്രശ്നങ്ങള് ഏറ്റെടുക്കേണ്ടത് പ്രധാനമാണ്. ഇമ്മാതിരിയുള്ള പ്രശ്നങ്ങളില് ഇടപെടുന്നതോടുകൂടി അടിച്ചമർത്തപ്പെടുന്ന ആള്ക്കാരുമായി കൂട്ടായ്മ ഉണ്ടാക്കി സമരം വിപുലീകരിക്കാം. ഇവര് അനുഭവിക്കുന്ന അടിച്ചമർത്തലുകള് എല്ലാം ഒരേ സമൂഹത്തിന്റെ ഭാഗമാണെന്ന് നമ്മള് മനസിലാക്കണം.]

In the initial phase of the movement, the activists attempted to address these issues that were seen as part of their position in an oppressive society. At the beginning of the movement, these persons insisted that the protest should address the larger questions of social oppression and marginalization, along with the specific problem of water pollution and depletion. In this context is where the decision was made to invite the popular leader of tribal people in Kerala, C.K. Janu, to inaugurate the movement. Several respondents also reported that they had made efforts to build alliances with other castes that were also experiencing similar forms of oppression. Thus, the earlier debates in the Plachimada movement related to how the nature of the social problem should be

addressed: while some activists agreed that addressing the water problem was of the immediate concern, there was a line of thinking within the Plachimada movement that raised the question of the persistent marginalization and oppression of people, particularly tribal persons. As a result, in the initial stages of the movement, the attempt was made to understand the water problem in Plachimada in relation to the general marginalization and oppression found in India.

Many fringe political groups that are not a part of the mainstream political processes and the parliamentary system had been working actively among tribal people in Kerala, thus mobilizing them to address the oppressive social practices that they experience, particularly land-alienation. Some of these groups were the earliest to offer support to the Plachimada movement. In light of their experiences with mobilization, they had a valuable perspective on how power works within the local society and measures to counter such power. Hence they advanced their perspective on what the movement should struggle against, thereby contributing to the on-going debates, although they were not in leadership positions. A respondent from such a political group that supported the Plachimada movement said:

> Right from the start, we had certain ideas about the nature and structure of the struggle, its conducting and its progress ahead. We have been relaying these ideas constantly to the leadership also. At the beginning of the struggle, it was understood as a struggle against exploitation of water. Later on, they incorporated the issue of contamination of water also. So, we have been consciously interacting with them with the view that if it is merely defined as a problem of lack of water, then if Coca Cola or any other agency including the state provides water, then the struggle of these people shouldn't suddenly end without addressing the several forms of oppression the tribal people face everyday.

> [ഈ സമരത്തിന്റെ രീതിയും പ്രത്യേകതകളെയും പറ്റിയും, ഇത് എങ്ങിനെ നടത്തണമെന്നതിനെയും എങ്ങിനെ മുൻപോട്ട് കൊണ്ട്പോകണമെന്നതിനെയും പറ്റി ഞങ്ങൾക്ക് ആദ്യം മുതലേ ധാരണയുണ്ടായിരുന്നു. അതെല്ലാം സമരത്തിന്റെ

നേതൃത്വത്തോട് ഞങ്ങള് സ്ഥിരമായി പറയാറുണ്ടായിരുന്ന. ഇതിന്റെ ആദ്യകാലത്ത് ഇതൊരു വെള്ളത്തെ ചൂഷണം ചെയ്യുന്നതിനെതിരെയുള്ള സമരമായി കണ്ടു. പിന്നീട് വെള്ളം മലിനീകരണവും പ്രധാന പ്രശ്നമായി കണ്ടു. ഇതിന്റെ അടിസ്ഥാനത്തില് ഞങ്ങള് പറഞ്ഞു പ്രശ്നം വെറും വെള്ളത്തിന്റെ പ്രശ്നമായി കണ്ടാല്, കൊക്ക കോളയോ അല്ലെങ്കില് മറ്റാരെങ്കില്യം വെള്ളം തരാമെന്ന പറഞ്ഞാല് സമരം ബാക്കിയുള്ള അടിസ്ഥാന പരമായ പ്രശ്നങ്ങള് -- പ്രത്യേകിച്ച് ആദിവാസികല്യടെ അടിച്ചമര്ത്തലിനെ സംബന്ധിച്ച പ്രശ്നങ്ങള് -- ഉന്നയിക്കാതെ നിന്നുപോകരുത്.]

According to these groups, globalization benefits "monopoly capitalists." Their argument is that the water problem in Plachimada is a result of "imperialism", whereby the resources in local communities are made appropriated by the monopoly capitalists. Such critics argued that these capitalists were allowed to appropriate resources in Kerala because their work benefited particular classes within the society. Based on this understanding, these political activists called on those associated with the Plachimada movement to view their movement as a part of the larger struggle against these tendencies in "globalization." Consistent with these ideas, the multinational corporations were seen as exploiters, and the movement participants were exhorted to struggle and drive them out of India. In other words, the Plachimada movement was to be seen as part of the larger struggles against neoliberal globalization. The same respondent added:

> So, as a result of our regular activities as part of the movement, we managed to get the idea across that the problem is beyond merely a question of water. Now they realize that it is a problem of the working of multinational capitalist groups. I think we have had a role to play in placing this discourse there in Plachimada. It is through our intervention that in the subsequent stages of the development of the struggle, they started putting forth this slogan more strongly.

[അങ്ങിനെ ഞങ്ങളുടെ സ്ഥിരമായ പ്രവര്ത്തനത്തിന്റെ ഫലമായി ഈ സമരം വെറും വെള്ളത്തിനവേണ്ടിയുള്ള സമരമല്ല എന്ന സ്ഥാപിച്ച. ഇപ്പോള് അവര് ഈ പ്രശ്നങ്ങള് ബഹുരാഷ്ട്രകുത്തകകളടെ പ്രവര്ത്തനത്തിന്റെ ഭാഗമാണെന്ന മനസിലാക്കുന്ന. അവിടെ അങ്ങിനെയുള്ള വിചാരമുണ്ടാക്കുന്നതില് ഞങ്ങളുടെ പ്രവര്ത്തനം സഹായിച്ചിട്ടുണ്ടെന്ന് അവര് അംഗീകരിക്കുന്ന. ഞങ്ങളുടെ

പ്രവർത്തനഫലമായാണ് അവര് പിന്നീട്, സമരം പുരോഗമിക്കുമ്പോള് ഈ മുദ്രാവാക്യം മുന്നോട്ടവച്ചത്.]

The first stage was characterized by relatively higher levels of discussion and debates among the activists, when compared to the latter phases. Many respondents reported that although at this stage the movement was short on resources, the atmosphere of discussions contributed to high levels of transparency. As a result, the movement is described as more cohesive at this stage. However, during this period, the movement came in for severe attack from the police, local politicians, and those who were employed at the plant. A woman respondent who was part of a fringe activist group that extended early support to Plachimada summed up the situation:

> Those who came to the struggle arena, particularly the adivasis [tribal people] and dalits [people in the lower strata of caste hierarchy], did not attend it seeing any particular form of benefit they would get. They were there because they felt intensely that the MNCs [multi national corporations] should leave India. They are exploiters. Our people realized this and they were willing to make sacrifices to the cause. It is in this sense that I said that the movement was strong. We used to stay there overnight on certain occasions. Many of us have stayed there overnight. During those times, when the vehicles that pass by at night, we used to feel that they were passing over us. It was pretty bad. But despite all that, we were determined to take the struggle forward. The struggle had a clear aim.

[സമരത്തില് പങ്കെടുത്ത ആള്ക്കാര്, പ്രത്യേകിച്ച് ആദിവാസികളും ദളിതരും എന്തെങ്കിലും സ്വാർത്ഥതാല്പര്യങ്ങള് മുന്നില് കണ്ടല്ല പങ്കെടുത്തത്. ബഹുരാഷ്ട്രകത്തകകള് ഇൻഡ്യ വിടണമെന്നുള്ള വിശ്വാസമുള്ളതുകൊണ്ടാണ് അവര് മുൻപോട്ട് വന്നത്. അവര് ചൂഷകരാണ്. ഇതു മനസ്സിലാക്കിയാണ് നമ്മുടെ ആള്ക്കാര് എന്ത് ത്യാഗത്തിനും തയ്യാറായി സമരത്തില് പങ്കെടുത്തത്. ഈ രീതിയിലാണ് ഞാന് പറഞ്ഞത് സമരം ശക്തിയുള്ളതായിരുന്നെന്ന്. പലരാത്രികളില് ഞങ്ങളില് പലരും അവിടെ പന്തലില് തങ്ങുമായിരുന്നു. പലപ്പോഴും രാത്രിയില് ബസ് ഞങ്ങളുടെ ദേഹത്ത് കൂടി കടന്നുപോകുന്നതുപോലെതോന്നുമായിരുന്നു. വളരെ കഷ്ടപ്പെട്ടു. പക്ഷെ ഈ ബുദ്ധിമുട്ടുകള് സഹിച്ച് സമരം മുമ്പോട്ട കൊണ്ടുപോകാന് ഞങ്ങള് ശ്രമിച്ചു. അപ്പോള് സമരത്തിന് വ്യക്തമായ ഉദ്ദേശമുണ്ടായിരുന്നു.]

During the initial phase two dimensions of their oppression were articulated – the local forms of caste based oppression and the tendency of the big corporations to appropriate the resources available to local communities. At the same time, the activists observed that some sections of the local society were benefiting from the presence of the plant. For instance, a prominent political leader was among the many land owners who sold water taken out of their land to the HCCB plant. Various local politicians also benefited indirectly from their supporters getting employment.[318] On the other hand, the "investment climate" in Kerala stood to gain symbolically from having big foreign corporations investing in the area. As a result of these discussions within the movement, the activists had a clear idea of the social forces that stood to benefit from globalization, and where the state and the political parties stood on this issue. In other words, "imperialism" and "globalization" were seen as embodying the interests of specific social classes:

> The politicians were only interested in the statistics of provision of jobs. Their view is thus: Coca Cola is coming in with investment of so many crores of rupees.[319] So, that is going to lead to generation of jobs – a few jobs. They are not concerned about what impacts it has on the environment and living conditions of people… Development in India is now oriented towards foreign direct investments. Now, there is a competition among states. You hear people say, "Andhra Pradesh has managed to bring in so many millions of foreign direct investment. Now, that state will have all the riches." The Marxists often have been criticized for their inability to aid industrial expansion in the state, because of their support of labor and labor problems. Now, the Marxist government in power here felt compelled to go for an image makeover and present themselves also as "investment friendly". That is how Coca cola was allowed to invest in Kerala in the first place.

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[318] Many respondents pointed out that only those who were unionized had the resources to gain employment in the plant. According to them, while the local people of Plachimada, mostly poor agricultural laborers, lost out, the politicians and trade union leaders used the employment opportunities at the plant as a way to dole out favors to their supporters.

[319] A crore equals 10 million.

[പുതുതായി നിര്‍മ്മിക്കപ്പെട്ടുന്ന ജോലികളില്‍ മാത്രമായിരുന്ന രാഷ്ട്രീയക്കാരുടെ താല്പര്യം. അവരുടെ വീക്ഷണം ഈ രീതിയിലായിരുന്നു. കൊക്കകോള ഇത്രയും കോടി രൂപയുടെ നിക്ഷേപവുമായി വരുന്നു. അത് തീര്‍ച്ചയയും ധാരാളം ജോലികള്‍ ഉണ്ടാക്കും. പക്ഷെ യാഥാര്‍ഥ്യത്തില്‍ വളരെ കുറച്ചജോലികല്‍ മാത്രമെ ഉണ്ടാക്കിയൊള്ളൂ. അവരെ സമ്ബന്ധിച്ചിടത്തോളം ജനങ്ങളടെ ജീവിതരീതിയെ അല്ലെങ്കില്‍ പരിസ്ഥിതിയെ ഇതെല്ലാം എങ്ങിനെ ബാധിക്കം എന്നുള്ളതു പ്രശ്നമേയല്ല. ഇപ്പോള്‍ ഇന്‍ഡ്യയില്‍ വികസനം വിദേശ നിക്ഷേപത്തെ ആശ്രയിച്ചാണ്. ഈയിടെയായി സംസ്ഥാനങ്ങള്‍ തമ്മില്‍ മത്സരമാണ്. ആള്‍ക്കാര്‍ പറയുന്നത് കേള്‍ക്കാം. ആന്ധ്രയില്‍ കോടിക്കണക്കിനത്രൂപയുടെ നിക്ഷേപം വരുന്നു. അവിടെ എല്ലാം മെച്ചപ്പെട്ടം. ഇത്രയും നാള് ഇവിട്ടത്തെ മാര്‍ക്സിസ്റ്റുകാരെ കുറ്റം പറയുമായിരുന്ന ഇവിട്ടുത്തുകാര്‍ ഫക്ടറികളില്ലാത്തതിന്. ഇപ്പോള്‍ മാര്‍ക്സിസ്റ്റുസര്‍ക്കാര്‍ പുതിയ ഇമേജ് തേടി നടക്കുകയാണ്. അവറ്ക്കമ് നിക്ഷേപകരെ വേണം. അങ്ങിനെയാണ് കൊക്കക്കോള പ്ളാച്ചിമടയില്‍ വന്നത്.]

Ever since the processes of economic liberalization were set-off in India in the early 1990s, the discourse on the public responsibility of the state, however minimally practiced until then, had diminished consistently and was replaced by the new logic of the market. Many in the movement, both in the initial part and in the latter phase when civil society activists emerged in leadership roles, identified the propensity of the "globalized state" to side with the "market forces." The activists in the movement, at this stage, understood clearly that the local elite and politicians were aligned with the "forces of globalization" rather than the marginalized people. Through their own experiences, at the inception of the movement, the state was understood as unresponsive to the social problems experienced by ordinary citizens.

Many respondents pointed out that the movement activists, mostly comprised of local tribal people, were determined initially to struggle against such tendencies in the state. At this stage, the several institutions of the state, at all its levels – including the local Panchayat – were opposed to the movement. At the same time, the police force was deployed with a mandate to use of force to intimidate the activists. In the face of all these

problems, the activists were determined, on the basis of solidarity, to continue the struggle.

There are significant contrasts between the early part of the struggle and the latter phase when civil society emerged as having a leadership role. After the first months when the Plachimada movement concentrated on mobilizing of people locally through establishing dialogues with people in different parts of Palakkad district, the Solidarity Committee that consisted of various voluntary associations and individuals was established. With the direct participation of these different associations media attention increased, with the result that the movement became increasing visible across Kerala. However, with these developments, the everyday activities of the movement underwent changes. While the earlier focus was on working toward clarity with regard to raising a collective understanding of the social problem, in the latter phase the movement's everyday activity came to be centered increasingly on supporting civil society organizations.

The voluntary organizations that rallied behind the movement took turns organizing events that protested against the HCCB plant on a daily basis. Various organizations would organize these protest marches, with local activists making up the "cadre strength."[320] Many respondents reported that unlike in the initial phase, these various organizations were inclined to understand the movement as struggling against a single issue – i.e. the water problem. Accordingly, there was no coordinated attempt on the part of the civil society organizations to understand in-depth, the social problem facing the people of Plachimada. These organizations saw the "empirical reality" of the

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[320] Haritha Bhoomi reported on a series of events organized by civil society organizations in Plachimada. During interviews, many local respondents spoke of their role as limited – particularly in terms of participatory decision making – after organizations that were part of Solidarity Committee took the lead.

"water problem," and the leadership of the Solidarity Committee did not perceive the need to establish dialogues to look deeper into this issue. During the field study many activists who have been part of many social movements in Kerala were critical of the civil society leadership in Plachimada for adopting a narrow view of the problem. Such an activist noted:

> There was a need to identify the concrete reasons – both manifest and underlying – for the problems that led to the Plachimada movement. For instance, the underlying reasons could be those related to political economy, and on the other hand, the state's loss of responsibility to the people, and the question of people's rights. Unfortunately, the movement could not provide a possibility for exploring and studying these factors that may have been crucial in producing the problems in Plachimada in the first place.
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> [പ്ളാച്ചിമട സമരമുണ്ടാകാനുള്ള അടിസ്ഥാനപരമായ -- വ്യക്തമായയും അല്ലാത്തതും -- കാരണങ്ങള് മനസ്സിലാക്കണ്ടത് ആവശ്യമാണ്. ഉദാഹരണത്തിന്, അടിസ്ഥാനപരമായ പ്രശ്ങ്ങള് സമ്ബദ് വ്യവസ്ഥയില് നിന്നുണ്ടാകുന്നതാകാം. അല്ലെങ്കില് ഗവര്മെന്റിന്റെ ജനങ്ങളോട്ടുള്ള പ്രതിപബ്ധ്ധത ഇല്ലാതാകുന്നതുകൊണ്ടാകാം. അല്ലെങ്കില് ജനാധികാരത്തിന്റെ പ്രശ്മാകാം. എന്താണെങ്കില്ം ഈ കാരണങ്ങള് മനസ്സിലാക്കാന് ശ്രമിക്കാഞ്ഞതില്ം അതിലേക്ക് ഉദ്ദേശം വച്ച് പഠനങ്ങള് നടത്താത്തതില്ം പ്ളാച്ചിമടസമരം പരാജയപ്പെട്ടു.]

As a result, different organizations that organized demonstrations on a regular basis, in the struggle arena, interpreted the problems that the movement sought to address in terms of their own particular interest. An important outcome of this shift was a profusion of rhetoric that identified the water problem in Plachimada to be the result of the plant's operation. With this turn, the focus of the movement came to be defined merely as closing down the HCCB plant. Later on, extracting compensation for the social costs suffered by the local people was also, in principle, identified as a key aim of the movement. The move to focusing on the "issue at hand" was a decisive shift away from

trying to understand and address the overall marginalization and oppression of the local people within a hegemonic system.

The emphasis on identifying the water problem in Plachimada as part of their marginalization and oppression meant that the local people could identify the interests of the local dominant classes as often opposed to their own. On the other hand, defining the problem merely in a particularistic way, during the phase when civil society was in the leadership of the movement, meant that activists focused only on getting rid of the HCCB plant. Ironically, during this phase, civil society emerged in the leadership of the movement and became its voice. When asked what the tribal people thought was the problem, a leader said:

> "They never try to articulate themselves. But they always take a tactical position… It is a simple thing. It doesn't need a theory to understand it. Whoever says that the Coca Cola plant can not open and function is with them. Unless someone says that the plant can open, they consider the person to be with them, in the struggle. That is it. It seems like innocent politics, but it is not."

[അവര് ഒരിക്കലും അവരുടെ കാഴ്ച്പ്പാട് മുൻപോട്ട വക്കില്ല. പക്ഷെ അവര് എപ്പോഴും ടാക്ടിക്കല് ആയി തീരുമാനം എട്ടക്കം. അത വളരെ സിമ്പിള് ആയിട്ടുള്ളകാര്യമാണ്. അത മനസ്സിലാക്കാന് തിയറിയുടെ ആവശ്യമില്ല. ആര് പറയുന്നോ കൊക്കക്കോള ഫാക്ടറിക്ക് പ്രവര്ത്തിക്കാന് അവകാശമില്ലെന്ന് ആര്ള പറയുന്നൊ അവര് സമരത്തിന്റ കൂടെയാണ്. ഫാകുറിക്ക് തുറക്കാമെന്ന പറയാത്ത എല്ലാവരും സമരത്തിന്റെ കൂടെയാണ്. അത്രുയെയുള്ള. ഇത് കേട്ടാല് മൌഢ്യമായ രാഷ്ടിയമാണെന്ന തോന്നാം. പക്ഷെ അങ്ങിനെ അല്ല.]

Such a limited view of both the activists, who were tribal people, and the questions that the movement sought to address – a view that was prevalent among civil society leadership – was inconsistent with the experiences of these persons. A local tribal activist spoke at length about how the movement, while not making any meaningful changes in their conditions of existence, had a rather negative impact on the community.

"We did not address the substantial problems that we are faced with. As a result of our participation in the movement, many of us have incurred financial losses. On the other hand, the movement has also left the community badly divided."

[ശരിക്കം പറഞ്ഞാല് ഞങ്ങളടെ സമുദായം അഭിമുഖീകരിക്കുന്ന വല്യ പ്രശ്നങ്ങളൊന്നും ഈ സമരത്തില്ന്നയിക്കാന് പറ്റിയില്ല. എന്നമാത്രമല്ല, സമരത്തിനവസാനം ഒന്നുമായില്ല എന്നൊരു തോന്നല്മ്. ഈ സമരത്തില് പങ്കെടുത്തുകൊണ്ട് ഞങ്ങളില് ധാരാളം പേറ്ക്ക് കാശ് നഷ്ടമുണ്ടായി. എന്ന മാത്രമല്ല, അവസാനം വന്ന് എല്ലാവരും തമ്മില് അടിയായി. ഇപ്പോള് സമുദായത്തില് ഒരു യോജിപ്പുമില്ലാത്ത സാഹചര്യമാണ്.]

The same person added during the interview: "… our efforts won't stop. Atrocities against tribal people continue to happen. Our movement in these areas will continue."

[ഞങ്ങളടെ ശ്രമങ്ങള് ഇവിടെ അവസാനിക്കില്ല. ആദിവാസി ആള്ക്കാറ്ക്കെതിരെ സ്ഥിരമായി ഉപദ്രവങ്ങളും മറ്റം ഇപ്പോഴും നടക്കന്നുണ്ട്. ഇങ്ങനെയുള്ള പ്രശ്നങ്ങള്ക്കെതിരെ സമരം തുടരും.]

Civil society respondents, during the interviews, often took credit for transforming a local issue into a global problem. A civil society leader recalled:

"Initially the movement was started as one to address a local problem of adivasis[321]. Media and NGOs did play a role in translating this into a bigger problem of water rights, and globalization itself. A lot of NGOs played crucial roles. They helped raise it as a global issue. The very presence of these towering personalities and other leaders such as Medha Patkar, Vandana Shiva etc itself gave it a lot of mileage. Apart from these, a lot of other leaders came from elsewhere too – like Canada, America, Colombia, parts of Europe etc."

[ആദ്യം ഈ സമരം തുടങ്ങിയത് സ്ഥലത്തുള്ള ആദിവാസികളടെ പ്രശ്നങ്ങള് ചറ്ച്ച ചെയ്യാനുള്ള ശ്രമമായിട്ടാണ്. മാധ്യമങ്ങളും എന്ജിയോകളും മറ്റം ചേര്ന്ന് ഇതു ജലത്തിനുമേല്യുള്ള ജനാധികാരത്തിനു വേണ്ടിയുള്ള, ആഗോളവല്ലരണത്തിനെതിരെയുള്ള സമരമാക്കി മാറ്റി. ധാരാളം എന്ജിയോകള് പ്രധാനപങ്ക് വഹിച്ചു. അവര് ഇതിനെ ഒരു ആഗോള പ്രശ്നമായി ഉയറ്ത്തി. മേധ പട്കര്, വന്ദന ശിവ, മുതലായ വലിയ ആള്ക്ലാറ് ഈ സമരത്തെ ധാരാളം

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[321] Adivasis is the Malayalam word for tribal people

സഹായിച്ചു. ഇവര് മാത്രമല്ലായിരുന്നു. ക്യാനഡ, അമേരിക്ക, കൊളമ്ബിയ മുതലായ വേറെ പല രാജ്യങ്ങളില് നിന്നും നേതാക്കള് എത്തി സഹായിച്ചു.]

Consistent with these ideas, a "World Water Conference" was organized in Plachimada, which was attended by many activists who also participated in the World Social Forum (WSF) held in Mumbai, India. Indeed, the Plachimada movement had figured prominently in the WSF meeting. During the Water Conference, the attendees advanced the idea of "water democracy" to express solidarity with the protestors in Plachimada. One such civil society leader who had participated in the meeting said of "water democracy":

> "Water is a right of the people, and not of the multinational monopoly capitalists. It is not correct to monopolize water. There should not be globalization of all these. In fact Plachimada struggle established this aspect: that water is people's fundamental right. It should not be privatized… The declaration said that water is a collective resource – a right of the people. It is a landmark declaration."

> [വെള്ളം ജനങ്ങളുടെ അധികാരമാണ്, ബഹുരാഷ്ട്രകത്തക മുതലാളിമാരുടെയല്ല. ഇങ്ങനെയുള്ള സാധനങ്ങളുടെ ആഗോളവല്ക്കരണം പാടില്ല. ശരിക്കും പറഞ്ഞാല്, പ്ളാച്ചിമട സമരം ഈ വസ്തുത സ്ഥിരീകരിച്ചു. വെള്ളം ജനങ്ങളുടെ അടിസ്ഥാനപരമായ അധികാരമാണെന്നും അത് സ്വകാര്യവല്ക്കരിക്കരുതെന്നും. ഈ പ്രഖ്യാപനം പറഞ്ഞു വെള്ളം എല്ലാവരുടെയും വിഭവമാണെന്ന്. അത് എല്ലവരുടെയും അധികാരമാണെന്ന്. ഇത് ഒരു സുപ്രധാനമായ പ്രഖ്യാപനമാണ്.]

Despite the emphasis on democracy, the role of the state – whether the state in India stands for ensuring the rights of people or is influenced by the interests of the market – was never addressed. The transformation of the state within the neoliberal context, through the increased influence of particular social classes/groups aligned with the market, was not identified as part of the problem. On the contrary, by the admission of a leader of the solidarity committee, the state was sought to be "won over":

Our main effort all through was to make sure that Coca Cola company was kept always as the main culprit, not the state, because in this situation it was not the state that we were fighting against primarily. We were fighting against Coca cola. So we were trying to get the state to support us as much as possible, despite its initial support for coca cola. Our victory has been that in the course of time, we managed to get the state to our side in many occasions.

[ഞങ്ങളുടെ ഉദ്ദേശം കൊക്കകോള കമ്പനിയെ പ്രധാന കുറ്റക്കാരാക്കി നിറ്ത്തുക എന്നതായിരുന്നു. ഗവണ്മെന്റിനെയല്ല. കാരണമ്, ഈ സാഹചര്യത്തില് ഞങ്ങള് ആത്യന്തികമായി സമരം ചെയ്തത് ഗവണ്മെന്റിനെതിരെയല്ല കൊക്കകോളയ്ക്കെതിരെയാണ്. അതിനാല് ഞങ്ങള് ഗവണ്മെന്റിനോട് ഞങ്ങളെ സഹായിക്കാന് ആവശ്യപ്പെടുകയായിരുന്നു. ഗവണ്മെന്റ് ആദ്യം കൊക്ക കോളയെ സഹായിച്ച എന്ന് അറിഞ്ഞുകൊണ്ടുതന്നെ. ഞങ്ങളുടെ വിജയം എന്തെന്നാല്, കാലക്രമേണ പല കാര്യങ്ങളിലും ഗവണ്മെന്റ് ഞങ്ങളെ സപ്പോറ്ട്ട് ചെയ്തു.]

Clearly, the leadership thought of the state as committed to addressing the social problems experienced by its citizens. Such belief ignores the alignment of the state with market forces, which has come to impede the ability of the government to act on behalf of its citizens who are faced with social problems related to the unfettered working of the market. Lacking a concrete understanding of the dominance of privileged classes/castes and the oppression experienced by marginalized groups, including tribal people, and collectively devising ways to overcome this exclusion, the attempt to redefine the local problem in a "global" way by using concepts like water democracy did not aid the struggle in Plachimada.

In a similar way, a leader of the solidarity committee, who referred to the state as "globalist state" that sides with the multinational firms, used the language of "rights" without specifying how they can be attained in practice:

If you observe closely, you can see that what started as a small and local struggle, it developed into a full fledged movement, that was run by very loosely knit, almost anarchist kind of organizational structure, and went on to influence the activities of the state and achieve the success it did.

Today, if Plachimada struggle is globally renowned, it is not because of the media support. But it is because of the content of the struggle. We managed to address the important question of the rights of the community, particularly related to rights over resources such as water.

[നിങ്ങള് അടുത്ത് നോക്കിയാല് പ്ളാച്ചിമട സമരത്തെക്കുറിച്ച് ചില കാര്യങ്ങള് മനസ്സിലാകും. വളരെ ചെറുതായി തുടങ്ങിയ ഒരു സമരം. ഒരു ലോക്കല് സമരം. അത് വളറ്ന്ന് വല്ലതായി. ഈ സമരം വളരെ ലൃസായ സംഘടനാക്രമവും രീതിയില്മൂന്നിയാണ് വളറ്ന്നത്. വളരെ അനാറ്കിസ്റ്റായ രീതി. എങ്കിലും ഈ സമരത്തിന് ഗവണ്മെന്റിന്റെ പല നയങ്ങളെയും ആത്യന്തികമായി സ്വാധീനിക്കാന് കഴിഞ്ഞു. ഇന്ന് പ്ളാചിമട സമരത്തെ കുറിച്ച് ലോകം അറിയുന്നെങ്കില് അത് മാധ്യമ പ്രവറ്ത്തകരുടെ സഹായം കൊണ്ട മാത്രമല്ല. ഈ സമരത്തിന്റെ ആന്തരിക സത്ത കൊണ്ട്കൂടിയാണ്. വളരെ സുപ്രധാനമായ ഒരു പ്രശ്നം ഞങ്ങള്ക്ക് ഉന്നയിക്കാന് കഴിഞ്ഞു -- സമുദായത്തിന്റെ അധികാരത്തെ പറ്റി, പ്രത്യേകിച്ച്, വെള്ളത്തിന്റെ ഉപയോഗം, അതിനുമേലുള്ള അധികാരം ആരുടെയാണ് എന്നതിനെ പറ്റി.]

Clearly, the civil society leaders defined the movement as a "need-based struggle" that addressed the question of exploitation of water. Some of the civil society leaders identified the movement as rebelling against the tendency of imperialism to appropriate natural resources.

"This aspect of politics – that now the fight is to protect natural resources of poor people from the onslaught of capitalism – was made clear to me through the Plachimada movement. Earlier, we used to talk about limits of growth. This is not an issue related to the limits of growth. Plachimada was a fight to protect the habitat and resources from the onslaught of capitalists."

[ഈ രാഷ്ടീയ വശം -- ഇപ്പോള് സമരം സാധാരണ പാവപ്പെട്ട ജനങ്ങളുടെ പ്രകൃതി വിഭവങ്ങള് മുതലെലിത്തത്തില് നിന്ന് രക്ഷിക്കാനുള്ളസമരമാണെന്ന -- മനസ്സിലാക്കിത്തന്നത് പ്ളാച്ചിമട സമരമാണ്. മുമ്പ് ഞങ്ങള് വളറ്ച്ചയുടെ സീമകളെപ്പറ്റി പറയുമായിരുന്നു. പറയാറില്ലെ ലിമിറ്റ്സ് ഓഫ് ഗ്രോത്. ഇത് ലിമിറ്റ്സ് ഓഫ് ഗ്രോത്തിനെ പറ്റിയുള്ള ഒരു പ്രശ്നമല്ല. പ്ളാച്ചിമട മനുഷ്യന്റെ ജീവിക്കാനുള്ള അവകാശവും വിഭവങ്ങളും മുതലാളിത്ത വാഴ്ചയില് നിന്ന് രക്ഷിക്കാനുള്ള സമരമാണ്.]

While the imperative of accumulation within capitalism was the impetus behind the "onslaught on habitat and resources," this process was actualized in Plachimada only through the existing social relations. Underlying the increasing trend of privatization of the commons, thus making natural resources accessible to appropriation by firms, are specific social forces that employ power and influence to force the state to act in their favor. The fact that the plant in Plachimada could not have existed without the approval of the powerful sectors of society means that any discussion of the problem without reference to how power is exercised within the local social relations renders any diagnosis or solution abstract. This crucial difference can be seen in the way the civil society leaders and the local people speak about the problem. On the one hand, these leaders continued to identify the problem as a "water problem" or an "onslaught on environment" caused by "imperialism" without providing any specifics. On the other hand, the local activists who initiated the movement speak in more experiential and concrete terms with reference to the "interests" of land owners, the upper castes, politicians, and the activities of the state and bureaucracy when they discuss the water problem.

As a result, the movement came in for severe criticism from the activists, both the local people as well as those who were part of the solidarity committee, but not those in leadership positions. An activist who was critical of the practices of the leadership said:

> "It is not merely a question of contamination of water. It is about the whole process of what is happening. We should have been entering the issue through Plachimada, through sound democratic action… Every environmental activist in Kerala worth his salt has also gone there. What has come out of all these? Some partial solutions, applicable locally? Even those haven't happened."

[ഇത് വെറും വെള്ള മലിനീകരണത്തെപ്പറ്റിയുള്ള പ്രശ്നമല്ല. ഇത് ഇവിടെ നടക്കുന്ന ആകമാനം പ്രശ്നങ്ങളെയും പ്രക്രിയ കളെയും കുറിച്ചാണ്. ശരിക്കും നമ്മള് പ്ളാചിമടയില് കൂടി ഈ പ്രക്രിയകളില് പ്രവേശിക്കണം. വളരെ ജനാധിപ്യപരമായ രീതികളില് കൂടി. കേരളത്തിലെ പേരിനുകൊള്ളാവുന്ന എല്ല പരിസ്ഥിതി പ്രവർത്തകന്മാരും അവിടെ പോയിട്ടുണ്ട്. പക്ഷെ ഫലമെന്തായി? ചുരുക്കം ചില ഭാഗികമായ ഉത്തരങ്ങള്, പ്രാദേശികമായവ? അത് പോല്യം നടന്നിട്ടില്ല.]

Organization, Leadership, and Decision Making Processes within the Plachimada Movement

Theories of New Social Movements (NSMs) have emphasized the significance of processes within a social movement. Some renditions of NSMs have gone to the extent of claiming that the internal processes of social movements, such as identity creation, should be seen as ends in-themselves rather than something instrumental, or as a means to larger ends. Regardless of whether the latter claim is questionable, a significant contribution of NSMs has been in understanding the internal processes of social movements.

This section will attempt to analyze the internal processes of the Plachimada movement. These processes, however, should not be understood in the abstract. Instead, they must be analyzed through the concrete practices that constitute the actual operation of the movement. The practices of organization, such as leadership and decision making, will be examined with a view to understanding the role of civil society within the Plachimada movement.

In the early phase that saw the emergence of the social movement, the leadership was largely indigenous in character. Activists from organizations such as Adivasi Samrakshana Samiti (ASS), Haritha Development Association, and People's Union for Civil Liberties (PUCL), which had deep roots in the tribal community, constituted the

leadership of the movement. In the leadership were also people from the local communities who were not associated with any of these organizations. Many of the respondents described the leadership at the beginning as "decentralized," or "spontaneous." The initial intent to mobilize people, in the form of a social movement, came from the local community members who experienced severe problems as a result of using polluted water. As mentioned in the above section, in course of the movement, many also sought to place the problem within the larger context of the intense marginalization experienced by these communities within the "mainstream" social processes.

According to an early leader, because of the general support for activism among the community members, "the initial mobilization was relatively easy." [ആദ്യമൊക്കെ ആൾക്കാരെ സമരത്തിലേക്കുകൊണ്ടുവരാൻ അത്ര ബുദ്ധിമുട്ടില്ലായിരുന്നു.] There was also a general feeling of dissatisfaction with the state and its agencies, politicians, and bureaucrats, who were seen as exploiting the local people in several ways that spurred many of them to join the mobilizations. According to another local leader, the local residents "decided to come out to discuss the problem spontaneously and expressed the need for a united struggle to counter the problems they faced." [ആൾക്കാർ തന്നെത്താനെ ഒരുമിച്ച് വന്ന് ഈ പ്രശ്നങ്ങളെ നേരിടാൻ സമരം തുടങ്ങണമെന്ന് തീരുമാനിച്ചു.]

In this context, the ASS was formed as an independent organization, in an effort to coordinate the activities of different individuals who were active in the tribal areas of Palakkad district in 2001. As a local activist involved in the formative stages of the movement respondent described this process:

> "In the context of increased activism, there came up the opinion that we should widen the scope and area of our work. So, we organized a

convention to focus on mobilization of adivasis. That is when Adivasi Samrakshana Sangham was formed."

[സെക്രട്ടേറിയറ്റ് സമരത്തിനിടെ എല്ലാവരും ഉഷാറായി. ആദിവാസി ആൾക്കാരെ ആക്രമിക്കുന്നതിനും അയിത്തത്തിനുമൊക്കെ എതിരായി ആൾക്കാര് ഒരുമിച്ച വന്നു തുടങ്ങി. ആ സമയം പലരും പറഞ്ഞു നമ്മുടെ പ്രവറ്ത്തികള് കുറെക്കൂടി ഉഷാറാക്കണമെന്ന്. അങ്ങനെ ഞങ്ങള് ആദിവാസികളുടെ ഒരു കണ് വെൻഷന് വിളിച്ചു. ഈ കണ് വെൻഷനിലാണ് ആദിവാസി സുരക്ഷണ സമിതി രൂപീകരിച്ചത്.]

Initially, the ASS organized a meeting in Palakkad and invited the tribal leaders who had launched a sustained struggle against the state to win back alienated land. According to several respondents, during this meeting, for the first time in a public forum, the water problem in Plachimada was discussed among other issues that the tribal communities faced.

The prevailing atmosphere of activism meant that the inaugural phase was characterized by high levels of interaction among the activists of the movement and coordinated activity. An activist remembered the early days of the movement: "The organization was very loosely structured. Those in leadership roles were all from among the Adivasi [tribal] community or those who have been working among them." [സമ്ഘടന വളരെ ഫോറ്മലല്ലാത്ത രീതിയിലായിരുന്നു. ആ സമയത്ത് നേതൃത്വത്തിലുണ്ടായിരുന്നവരെല്ലാം ഒന്നെങ്കില് ആദിവാസികളൊ അല്ലെങ്കില് അവരുടെക്കൂടെ പ്രവറ്ത്തിചിട്ടുള്ളവരോ ആയിരുന്നു.] As should be noted, these decision-making processes were rather diffuse, yet coordinated, within the movement in the initial stages.

On the basis of the awareness that they were up against a big corporation, with a lot more resources than they could muster, many had expressed doubts about how the movement would progress. A local respondent spoke of the willingness of the local people to partake in Plachimada movement:

"We all got together the day before an important meeting that announced the movement and discussed the possibility that it is going to be a difficult movement. Yet, the mood was one of optimism and all of us present at the meeting pledged that we will stand by the movement until the end."

[സമരം തുടങ്ങുതിന്റെ തലേദിവസം ഞങ്ങള് എല്ലാവരും ഒത്തുചേര്ന്ന് സമരം എങ്ങിനെയായിരിക്കും മുമ്പോട്ട് പോകുക എന്നതിനെ കുറിച്ച് ചിന്തിച്ചു. ഞങ്ങള്ക്കറിയാമായിരുന്നു ഇത് വളര ബുദ്ധിമുട്ട് സഹിക്കേണ്ടിവരുന്ന ഒരു സമരമായിരിക്കുമെന്ന്. പക്ഷെ എല്ലാവര്ക്കും ഒരു ശുഭാപ്തിവിശ്വാസം ഉണ്ടായിരുന്നു. ആ മീറ്റിങ്ങില് പങ്കെടുത്ത എല്ലാവരും പ്രതിജ്ഞ ചെയ്തു ഞങ്ങള് എല്ലാവരും സമരത്തിന്റെ അവസാനം വരെ ഒരുമിച്ചു നില്ലും എന്ന്.]

The original emphasis was on "collectivities." Most respondents referred to collectivities as emerging from working together on issues, and characterized them as having high levels of solidarity. This local leader added:

"During this time, the main emphasis was on developing the movement against a lot of opposition from the police, the Panchayat, politicians, and above all, from the plant management itself. Many of us worked very hard, often staying over at the struggle arena itself. On many days, we would go in groups to other villages to campaign. Since we were short on money often, we would bicycle to these far away places. Sometimes, we would end up staying over at the place of those who sympathized with us in these villages. There was a lot of struggle in the initial phase."

[ആദ്യ കാലഘട്ടത്തില്, പൊലീസിന്റെ ഭാഗത്തുനിന്നും, പഞ്ചായത്ത്, രാഷ്ട്രീയക്കാര്, കമ്പനിയുടെ ആള്ക്കാര്, ഇവരില് നിന്നെല്ലാം ധാരാളം എതിര്പ്പുണ്ടായിരുന്നു. ഇതിനെതിരെ സമരം വളര്ത്തുക എന്നതായിരുന്ന ലക്ഷ്യം. ഞങ്ങള് പലരും വളരെ കഷ്ടപ്പെട്ടു പണിയെടുത്തു. പല ദിവസങ്ങളിലും സമരപ്പന്തലില് തന്നെ ഉറങ്ങി. മിക്കവാറും ദിവസങ്ങളില് ഞങ്ങള് സംഘം ചേര്ന്ന് അടുത്തുള്ള ഗ്രാമങ്ങളില് പോകുമായിരുന്നു. മിക്കവാറും വണ്ടിക്കൂലിക്ക് കാശ് കൈയില് ഇല്ലതിരുന്നതിനാല് സൈക്കിളിലും മറ്റുമായി ദൂരസ്ഥലങ്ങളില് പോകുമായിരുന്നു. ആങ്ങിനെ കറങ്ങി കറങ്ങി ഏതെങ്കിലും ഗ്രാമത്തില് രാത്രിതങ്ങും. അങ്ങിനെ ആദ്യ കാലങ്ങളില് ധാരാളം ബുദ്ധിമുട്ട് സഹിക്കേണ്ടി വന്നു.]

At the same time, when many of its activists would be engaged in campaigns in the neighboring villages, those in Plachimada would organize processions, marches, and demonstrations at the front gate of the plant on a regular basis. Many respondents

emphasized the sense of collectivity – the activists got together and divided work in consultation with one another. And despite the obvious resource crunch, they kept the movement going in this initial phase.

Despite the hard work, the movement started encountering many crises, particularly in the face of stiff opposition from the powerful and dominant groups in society. At the same time, the mainstream media largely ignored the Plachimada movement. In the absence of addressing the question of generating resources and employing creative efforts toward this and, the movement faced an acute shortage of money and other necessities. A local activist who felt that the movement, in its later stages, did not live up to the expectation of the local people, reminisced: "Many of us had to give up our daily work to be able to devote our full time to the movement. That was very tough for us and many of us ended up incurring substantial debt." [ഞങ്ങളില് മിക്കവരും ദിവസത്തൊഴിലാളികളാണ്. ദിവസത്തെ ജോലി ഉപേക്ഷിച്ചാണ് ഞങ്ങള് സമരത്തിനവേണ്ടി മുഴുവന് സമയവും കഷ്ടപ്പെട്ടത്. അത് ഞങ്ങൾക്ക് ധാരാളം കഷ്ടതകളുണ്ടാക്കി. പലറ്ക്കും ധാരാളം കടങ്ങളുണ്ട്.] Also, various onslaughts on the activists continued, particularly from the police. Another local activist associated with the struggle committee recounted that

> "The police would arrest us on the slightest of pretexts. For example, they would arrest us in the middle of our campaigns in the villages on the grounds that we didn't seek prior permission to use loud speakers. After arresting us, they would impose heavy charges upon us. There was a time when we were even accused of waging war against the state, although we were peacefully protesting against the HCCB plant."

[വളരെ ചെറിയ കാരണം മതി പൊലീസുകാര് ഞങ്ങളെ അറസ്റ്റ് ചെയ്യാന്. ഉദാഹരണത്തിന്, വേറെ ഗ്രാമങ്ങളില് പ്രവറ്ത്തനം ചെയ്യുമ്പോള് മൈക്കിന് പെറ്മിഷന് വാങ്ങിയില്ല എന്നു പറഞ്ഞ് അറസ്റ്റ് ചെയ്യും. അങ്ങിനെ അറസ്റ്റ്

ചെയ്തിനു ശേഷം വേറെ പല കേസ്സിലും കുരുക്കും. ഒരു പ്രാവശ്യം ഞങ്ങൾക്കെതിരേ രാജ്യദ്രോഹക്കുറ്റം ചുമത്തി. ശരിക്കും ഞങ്ങള് ചെയ്തത് എന്താണെന്നാല്, കമ്പനിയ്ക്ക് മുമ്പില് ശാന്തമായി പ്രകടനം നടത്തി. ആത്രയെയുള്ളൂ..]

In this context, some of the civil society activists, who had been working with the tribal communities, contacted other civil society leaders in different parts of Kerala, who extended their support. And after the initial phase, two organizations emerged prominently within the social movement – the Struggle Committee and the Solidarity Committee. The latter constituted the different voluntary associations, organizations, and individuals who supported the Plachimada movement.

The involvement of civil society activists, particularly in leadership positions, had a significant impact on the direction of the movement. After the formation of the solidarity committee, the decisions regarding the direction of the movement came to be made by the leadership of the struggle and solidarity committees. This second phase was characterized by a shift in the working style of the activists in the movement. During this phase, the focus shifted in two crucial ways: (1), the movement sought to win over the influential sections of the media and, (2), campaigns were directed at getting the political groups to support its cause. In general, this change was accompanied by the increasing visibility of the movement in other parts of Kerala.

However, this shift also meant reorienting the activities of the movement, its organization, and the priorities of the leadership. On the one hand, this turn of events meant that, in concrete terms, the focus of the movement shifted away from ground level mobilization of the local communities, as was the case in the initial stages. On the other hand, decisions regarding the direction of the movement came to be made increasingly by

those at the leadership level, based on the connections they had established, thus alienating the local people from these processes.

As a result, the role of the local people, who originally suffered from the social problems that sparked off the movement, was limited to "making up the numbers" at protest demonstrations. This was in sharp contrast to the claims of many of the respondents, particularly by those in the leadership, that the movement – particularly in the early phase – had a spontaneous and decentralized leadership and organizational character. Such organization and leadership was, often in a celebratory fashion, contrasted with those of the political parties, which are known to have hierarchies of leadership where decision making is centralized. Of the initial leadership in the movement, a Plachimada resident remarked:

> "In Plachimada, the leadership was not that of the established political parties. So, such pressures as often confronted by political parties (pressures from those in the higher levels of leadership etc.) were not there in Plachimada. This meant that the local leadership of the movement was solely responsible for taking the decisions."

> [പ്ളാച്ചിമടയില് നേതൃത്വം സാധാരണ രാഷ്ട്രീയ പാറ്ട്ടികളുടെ മാതിരിയല്ലായിരുന്നു. അതിനാല് സാധാരണയായി രാഷ്ട്രീയകക്ഷികള് നേരിട്ടന്ന പ്രശ്നങ്ങള് അവിടെ ഇല്ലായിരുന്നു. ഉദാഹരണത്തിന്, മേളില്നിന്നുള്ള ഓര്ഡറുകള് ഇല്ലായിരുന്നു. ഇതിന്റെ അറ്ഥം, പ്രാദേശിക നേതൃത്വമായിരുന്നു തീരുമാനങ്ങള് എടുത്തത്.]

With the movement gaining increased media attention and visibility in the public sphere in Kerala, many civil society groups and activists from various parts of this region started visiting Plachimada to support the movement. Thus, a civil society leader who later joined the movement described Plachimada a veritable "pilgrimage center" for the environmentalists and other civil society activists in Kerala.

As a result, on a daily basis, the momentum in the struggle arena in Plachimada was sustained by the individual civil society organizations that would hold their meetings with local activists in the audience. At the end of such actions, the civil society organizations would make contributions to the movement in the form of money or other goods. This pattern of movement activity in Plachimada continued following the increased role of the civil society groups. A civil society activist who was part of many social movements in Kerala declared:

"On a regular basis, various organizations would come over here and organize functions such as protest demonstrations, make speeches etc in the struggle arena. The local people sit in the struggle arena and form the audience. During the meetings, one or two representatives of the local people in the Struggle committee would make speeches also."

[മിക്ക ദിവസങ്ങളിലും സമരത്തെ പിന്തുണച്ച പല സംഘടനകളും സമരപ്പന്തലില് വന്ന് മീറ്റിങ്ങുകളും മറ്റും നടത്തും. അപ്പോള് ഇവിടത്തെ ആള്ക്കാര് സമരപ്പന്തലില് ഒരുമിച്ചുകൂട്ടം പ്രസംഗങ്ങള് കേള്ക്കാന്. ഇവിടുള്ളവരില് ഒന്നരണ്ടുപേര് പ്രസംഗിക്കുകയും ചെയ്യും.]

The general opinion among the respondents was that in the initial days of its constitution, the Solidarity Committee – the body of various civil society groups that supported the movement – was democratic. However, in due course, this shift in the style was detrimental to the spirit of participation in the movement:

"The solidarity committee was more inclusive and democratic in the beginning. Many people were genuinely interested in the issues raised by the struggle of the Plachimada people, rather than in advancing their own self interest. However, in the interim period between then and now, the character of solidarity committee has undergone a lot of changes. In not encouraging participation of the local people and in the failure to acknowledge the movement as theirs, we perhaps created a sort of dependency."

[ആദ്യകാലങ്ങളില് ഐക്യദാര്ഡ്യസമിതി കൂടുതല് ജനാധിപത്യപരമായിരുന്നു. മിക്ക ആള്ക്കാരും പ്ളാച്ചിമട ഉയര്ത്തിയ പ്രശ്നങ്ങളില് തല്പ്പരരായിരുന്നു. അവര് സ്വന്തം താല്പ്പര്യങ്ങള് നോക്കാനായിരുന്നില്ല ഈ സമരത്തില് ചേര്ന്നത്. പക്ഷെ

ഇടക്കലത്ത്,   ഐക്യദാറ്ഡ്യസമതിയില്   ധാരാളം   മാറ്റങ്ങള്   വന്നു.
ഈയിടെയായി   തദ്ദേശവാസികളുടെ   താല്പര്യം   കുറഞ്ഞു.   ഇത്   അവരുടെ
സമരമാണെന്ന് അംഗീകരിക്കണ്ടതാണ്. അത് അംഗീകരിക്കാത്തുകൊണ്ടും, ആ
രീതിയില്ല്ലുള്ള പ്രവറ്ത്തന ശൈലികൊണ്ടഉം, നമ്മള് അവിടെ കൂടുതല് വിധേയത്വം
വരുത്തുകയാണ് ചെയ്തത്.]

As this change was becoming visible, there were criticisms from within the
movement that asked the leadership to make collective decisions regarding the direction
of the struggle. Many fringe political groups, who had been mobilizing people in tribal
areas, suggested that the movement should grow by increasing the intensity of
mobilization through establishing continued dialogue with local people. At the same
time, the movement leadership was asked to devise appropriate forms of concrete action
to counter the attacks and threats from traditional politicians and trade unionists. Some
critics also warned that reorienting priorities to win over external resources would lead to
dependence that may imperil the movement. They emphasized that the overall focus
should be on the generation of resources internally rather than depend on external
sources. A respondent who claimed to have attempted to establish a culture of open and
constructive criticism and dialogue based participation argued that:

> "Every struggle needs to develop, and most often the development is
> through conscious decision making. At that time we were only doing sit-
> ins in front of the gate of the HCCB plant and shouting slogans. They on
> their part were filing cases against us in court and with police. We realized
> that we couldn't go much forward only on these lines. It requires
> conscious efforts at developing the struggle at every stage. We used to
> constantly tell them about the importance of these – or the struggle may
> not progress much on these lines. In fact, the common people of
> Plachimada who were part of the struggle were ready for such efforts.
> However, the leadership was not ready… We insisted that we do justice to
> those partaking in the struggle. However, the leadership seemed reticent to
> our proposals."

[എല്ലാ   സമരങ്ങളും   വികസിക്കണം.   ഈ   വികസനം   പലപ്പോഴും   ഘട്ടം
ഘട്ടമായിട്ടായിരിക്കും. ആദ്യകാലത്ത്, സമരരീതി കോള കമ്പനിയുടെ മുമ്പില്

ഉള്ള സമരപ്പന്തലില് ഇരുന്ന്, മുദ്രാവാക്യം മുഴക്കുകയായിരുന്നു. അവരുടെ ഭാഗത്തുനിന്ന് ഞങ്ങള്ക്കെതിരെ പൊലീസിലും കോടതിയിലും കേസുകള് കൊടുത്തുകൊണ്ടേയിരുന്നു. ആദ്യമേ ഞങ്ങള് മനസ്സിലാക്കി ഈ രീതിയില് അധികം മുന്നോട്ട പോകാന് പറ്റില്ല എന്ന്. സമരം വികസിപ്പിക്കാന് ഉദ്ദേശം വച്ച് പ്രവര്ത്തിക്കണം. ഞങ്ങള് ഇതിനെ പറ്റി സമര നേതൃത്വത്തോട് സ്ഥിരമായി സം വേദിച്ചുകൊണ്ടിരുന്നു. അവരോട് സ്ഥിരമായി പറയുമായിരുന്നു, ഈ രീതിയില് സമരം വികസിക്കുകയില്ല എന്ന്. ചിലപ്പോള് കഠിന പ്രയത്നത്തോടൊപ്പം എതിറപ്പ് തരണം ചെയ്യാനും ആള്ക്കാരില് വിശ്വാസമുണ്ടാക്കാനും ചില രീതികളില് സമരം ചെയ്യേണ്ടി വരും. പക്ഷേ, നേതൃത്വം ഇതിനൊന്നും തയ്യാറല്ലായിരുന്നു. ഞങ്ങള് സ്ഥിരമായി പറഞ്ഞു, നമ്മള് സമരത്തില് പങ്കാളികളായ സാധാരണ ആള്ക്കാരില് വിശ്വാസം വളറത്തണം. അവരോട് നീതി കാട്ടണം. നേതൃത്വം ഇതൊന്നും പരിഗണിച്ചില്ല..]

The change in the nature of activities in Plachimada was accompanied by campaigns – in the media and through other networks – intended to win over powerful personalities, politicians, and groups to bring about a decisive shift in public opinion. As a result, the movement came to depend increasingly on "networks" and "connections" rather than the active mobilization of local people. Thus, as a respondent from the fringe political groups remarked, "the struggle kept developing although not in ways that reflected the active participation of the local people." [അങ്ങിനെ സമരം വളറന്നുകൊണ്ടിരുന്നു എങ്കിലും ഈ വളറ്ച്ച സാധാരണ ആള്ക്കാരുടെ, പ്രത്യേകിച്ച് തദ്ദേശവാസികളുടെ കൂട്ടായ്മയോടുകൂടിയോ അല്ലെങ്കില് അവര് ആഗ്രഹിച്ച രീതിയിലോ അല്ലായിരുന്നു.] Another respondent suggested that this ensued in a series of events that substantially changed the character of the leadership and organization.

When a top leader of a political party that controlled the local Panchayat was visiting Palakkad, a group of Plachimada activists met with him. A local tribal person involved in the movement pointed out:

"He had been a champion of anti-globalization struggles in Kerala and had been writing books about the bad effects of globalization. We went up to

him and asked him that in the context of his convictions how his party could support an exploitive multinational corporation that threatened the existence of poor communities in Plachimada."

[അദ്ദേഹം ആഗോളവല്ലരണത്തിനെതിരെയുള്ള നേതാവാണ്. കേരളത്തില് മുഴുവന് ആഗോളവല്ലരണത്തിനെതിരെ പ്രസമ്ഗിക്കാറുണ്ട്. ഇതിന്റെ ചീത്തവശങ്ങളെപ്പറ്റി ധാരാളം പുസ്തകങ്ങള് എഴുതിയിട്ടുണ്ട്. ഇവിടെ അടുത്തുള്ള വണ്ടിത്താവളത്ത വന്നപ്പോള് ഞങ്ങള് അദ്ദേഹത്തെപ്പോയി കണ്ടു. എന്നിട്ട ചോദിച്ചു, ഇത്രയും ആഗോളവല്ലരണത്തിനെ എതിര്ക്കുന്ന നിങ്ങളുടെ പാറ്റി ഭരിക്കുന്ന പഞ്ചായത്ത് എങ്ങിനെയാണ് പാവപ്പെട്ട ജനങ്ങള്ക്കെതിരെ ഒരു ബഹുരാഷ്ടകുത്തകയെ പിന്തുണക്കുന്നത്?]

Also alleged was that a local leader of the same political party was selling water drawn from his land to the HCCB plant.[322] Responding to these criticisms, the leader who visited Palakkad promised movement activists that he and his party would support the struggle.

Under pressure from the higher echelons of leadership, the local leaders of the political party had to turn around and back the movement. This change, along with a shift in public opinion in favor of the movement, was also partly responsible for the Panchayat deciding to support the protest. From the time of the Panchayat extending support to the movement, activities further shifted from the mobilization of local people to the corridors of the state. With the Panchayat deciding to not renew the license of the plant, and the HCCB's decision to file a suit in the High Court against the Panchayat's ruling, the movement started focusing on legal suits, with the local people not having much of a role. During these times, the decisions regarding the legal suit were made largely by a small group of individuals who were in leadership positions in the Struggle and Solidarity committees, in consultation with the Panchayat and political leaders. Most of the original

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[322] Haritha Bhoomi. Many respondents stated during interviews that the leader in question later on apologized to the activists for selling water to Coca Cola and started supporting the movement.

activists in the movement – the tribal people of Plachimada – found their roles in the movement limited to participating merely in the sit-ins in the struggle arena and hoping that their case will be well represented by the agencies of the State in the Courts. A civil society activist who was critical of the leadership described the increasing tendency of the movement organization to mirror that of the traditional political parties:

> Based on democratic centralism that is followed by most parties here – both of the left and right – decisions are made at the top, among a small clique of the leadership. Decisions are then conveyed to the cadres. Here democracy becomes merely limited to such passing of information about decisions taken at the top. The distinction between the leadership and cadre is very strong here. These tendencies that are characteristic of the political parties here have percolated into civil society groups and even within a movement like Plachimada. We know, both in theory and practice, that democratic centralism doesn't necessarily have much democracy in it. It is merely another term for centralization.

> [ഇവിടെ മിക്ക പാറ്റ്ടികളും ഒരു തരത്തിലുള്ള ഡെമോക്രാറ്റിക് സെൻട്രലിസത്തിന്റെ അടിസ്ഥാനത്തിലാണ് വറ്ക്ക് ചെയ്യുന്നത്. ഇതിന്റെ അറ്ഥം തീരുമനങ്ങള് മേളില് -- ഒരു ചെറിയ കൂട്ടം ആള്ക്കാരുടെ ഇടക്ക് -- എടുക്കപ്പെടുന്നു. ഇവിടെ ജനാധിപത്യമെന്നാല് മേളില് എടുക്കപ്പെടുന്ന തീരുമാനങ്ങള് താഴേക്കിടയിലുള്ള പാറ്റ്ടിപ്രവറ്ത്തകരിലേക്ക് എത്തിച്ചുകൊടുക്കുന്നു. ലീഡറും കാഡറും തമ്മിലുള്ള വൃത്യാസങ്ങള് വളരെ വല്യതാണിവിടെ. രാഷ്ട്രിയക്കാരുടെ ഇടയിലുള്ള ഇത്തരം പ്രവണതകള് സിവില് സമൂഹത്തിലും പ്ളാച്ചിമട സമരത്തില് പോല്യം ബാധിച്ചിട്ടുണ്ട്. നമ്മുക്കറിയാം, പ്രവറ്ത്തിയിലും വിശ്വാസത്തിലും ഡെമൊക്രാറ്റിക് സെൻട്രലിസത്തില് അധികം ജനാധിപത്യമില്ല. ഇത് കേന്ദ്രീകരണത്തിനുള്ള വേറൊരു പേരാണ്.]

The leadership of the movement considered that winning the support of the political parties and the Panchayat, which were initially opposed to this struggle, to be the highest priority. Some of the respondents, who were in the leadership positions in the movement, attributed what they thought was the "success" of the movement (the fact that the HCCB plant is temporarily closed pending appeal in the Supreme Court of India) to the involvement of the political leaders, along with the support of some of the 'national level leaders' of civil society initiatives.

Clearly, such processes had immense impact on the further direction of the movement. This new direction was preceded and accompanied by increasing media coverage of the movement, which sought to define it as addressing the "water problem." The leadership, due to the failure of sustained dialogue within the movement and with the local communities, acquiesced to this depiction of the problem. Accordingly, a leader of the Plachimada struggle defined it as a need-based movement. Implicit in this assertion was the "particularity" of the problem in Plachimada. In other words, the problem was not understood as emanating from the basic structure of the relations among the various social forces. Asked whether the movement provided an opportunity to critique the marginalization in Plachiamda, a civil society leader admitted:

> No, there was not much of that. It perhaps has got to do with the complexity of the whole issue. Ideally, we should have taken into account these factors and then planned our strategies. I understand that such a movement and the situation within the movement arose is conducive for a dialogue among the people and as a result of which the people together, in the community, come to certain awareness about the processes. Based on this awareness, they should together chart out a course of action. However, that has not happened in this movement. There may be reasons, but it should have happened.

> [ഇല്ല. അതൊന്നും അധികമില്ലായിരുന്നു. ഒരു പക്ഷെ, ഈ പ്രശ്ത്തിന്റെ കാഠിന്യം കൊണ്ടായിരിക്കമ്. ശരിയ്ക്കും പറഞ്ഞാല് ഇതെല്ലാം കണക്കിലെടുത്ത് മുൻപോട്ട പോകണമായിരുന്നു. ഇങ്ങനെയുള്ള ഒരു സമരവും അതിനള്ളില്ലുണ്ടാകുന്ന പ്രക്രിയകളും ഇപ്പറഞ്ഞ മാതിരിയുള്ള ഒരു സം വാദത്തിനുസാധ്യത ഒരുക്കാമായിരുന്നു. അങ്ങിനെയുള്ള സമ്വാദത്തിന്റെ അടിസ്ഥാനത്തില് അവര്ക്ക് കൂട്ടായ്മ കെട്ടിപ്പടുക്കാമായിരുന്നു. ഈ അറിവിന്റെ അടിസ്ഥാനത്തില് അവര് പുതിയതായി നീക്കങ്ങള് നടത്തണം. പക്ഷെ അതൊന്നും ഈ സമരത്തില് നിര്ഭാഗ്യവശാല് നടന്നില്ല. കാരണങ്ങള് ഉണ്ടാവാം പക്ഷെ നടന്നില്ല.]

To use an analogy, the water problem in Plachimada was seen as the disease that required treatment, rather a symptom of what ails the society in general.

Having identified the problem in a narrow sense, the course of the movement was designed to provide a specific remedy. The approach of the leadership was thus: the energies of the movement should be focused on meeting this specific need rather than raising larger issues. Hence, the ways of fixing the problem were explored within the conventional channels – particularly the State – despite the fact that the government was instrumental in bringing about the situation in the first place. Once the movement became dependent increasingly on networks and connections, those with access to these started running everything. The implicit message was: let the local people who have been already mobilized remain part of the movement. But there is no need for focusing on further painstaking mobilization on the ground level. The work of the movement thus came to be defined in "functional" terms, with the focus on approaching the state to fix the problem.

Even after the issue was identified as water pollution and depletion, many respondents agreed that there was really no attempt to document this problem. Several activists, at various stages, argued that the focus should be documenting in detail the social dimension of the water problem in Plachimada. Many pointed out that such efforts would have helped establish the main claim of the movement: There is a connection between the operation of the HCCB plant and the water problem. Yet, many respondents reported that such efforts were discouraged, while adopting the rationale that studying the problem is not the work of the movement activists. But, a civil society activist who felt the need for documentation made the following point:

> "We felt that organizing studies about what was happening was extremely important. Such studies could have actively encouraged the participation of the local people and may have had an empowering effect on them. Instead, the leadership chose to organize the movement through the media.

It turned out to be a superficial way of running a movement – relying more on the media alone to spread the word about the movement."

[ഞങ്ങള് മനസ്സിലാക്കിയിടത്തോളം അങ്ങിനെയുള്ള പഠനങ്ങള് നടത്തണ്ടത് വളരെ അത്യാവശ്യമാണ്. ഈ പഠനങ്ങള് തദ്ദേശവാസ്സികളെ പങ്കെടുപ്പിച്ച് നടത്താമായിരുന്നു. ആതിന്റെ അടിസ്ഥാനത്തില് അവരുടെ പങ്കാളിത്തം വറ്ഡ്ധിപ്പിക്കാമായിരുന്നു. ഇത് തീറ്ച്ചയായും സമൂഹത്തെ മാറ്റാനുള്ള അവരുടെ കഴിവുകളെ വെളിയില് കൊണ്ടവരമായിരുന്നു. അടിസ്ഥാനപരമായി അവരെ ശാക്തീകരിക്കാമായിരുന്നു. പക്ഷെ ഇതിനൊന്നും ശ്രമിക്കാതെ സമരനേതൃത്വം സമരം മാധ്യമങ്ങളില്ലൂടി നടത്തുന്നതില് ശ്രദ്ധ കേന്ദ്രീകരിച്ച്. അതിനു പകരം അവസാനം നടന്നത് വളര ഉപരിപ്ലവമായ രീതിയില്ലുള്ള സമരക്രമങ്ങളായിരുന്നു, മാധ്യമ്ങങളൊട്ടുള്ള വിധേയത്വം പോലെ.]

A Plachimada study committee, which was constituted through the initiative of activists, was discouraged from functioning through the main phase of the movement. At the time of the fieldwork, when a respondent remarked that the movement was at a "low tide," the activists were trying to put together a group of enthusiastic local youngsters to engage in a concrete study of the problems in Plachimada in order to revive the struggle.

A crucial outcome of the involvement of the civil society actors in Plachimada was that its strategy shifted to negotiating with the politicians and the agencies of the state, while keeping the local people mobilized in the struggle arena in front of the HCCB plant. Clearly, an important implication of such an approach was ceding the leadership the movement to the politicians, who were seen originally as part of the problem. According to many respondents this approach was incapable of calling into question the existing social relations, which are instrumental in producing the marginalization and oppression of the tribal communities.

Depending on the civil society leadership for resources and politicians to "solve the problem" stifled the Plachimada movement – particularly related to establishing internal democracy and collective decision making. Many activists complained during the

interviews that many of the issues they tried to raise within the movement were never addressed. They pointed out that ever since the movement took the above mentioned turn, meetings intended to discuss the direction of the movement became increasingly rare. One of them claimed:

> "One of the key reasons for the degeneration of the movement is the fact that that the activists are not encouraged meeting all that often. The activists should be meeting on a timely basis, let us say at least once a month. In the absence of these meetings, decisions are taken in a unilateral fashion, almost as if the local people, and the other well wishers who have been part of the movement do not have any role in it at all."

> [ഈ സമരത്തില് പങ്കെടുക്കുന്ന ആള്ക്കാരെ സ്ഥിരമായി മീറ്റിങ്ങുകള് കൂടുന്നതില് നിന്ന് പിന്തിരിപ്പിക്കുന്നത് തന്നെ ഈ സമരം ഇല്ലാതാവാനുള്ള ഒരു പ്രധാന കാരണമാണ്. ഇമ്മാതിരിയൊരു സമരത്തില് സമരക്കാര് സ്ഥിരമായി, മാസത്തിലൊരുപ്രാവശ്യമെങ്കിലും, മീറ്റിങ്ങ് കൂടണം. അങ്ങിനെയുള്ള മീറ്റിങ്ങുകള് ഇല്ലാത്ത സാഹചര്യത്തില് തീരുമാനങ്ങള് എടുക്കുന്നത് ഒരു ചെറിയ കൂട്ടം ആള്ക്കാരായിരിക്കും. അങ്ങിനെ വരുമ്പോള് സമരത്തിലെ സാധാരണ ആള്ക്കാരുടെ അഭിപ്രായങ്ങള് കേള്ക്കപ്പെടാതെ വരും. അവര്ക്ക് സമരത്തില് ഒരു പങ്കും ഇല്ലയെന്ന രീതിയിലേക്ക് സാഹചര്യം നീങ്ങും. ഇത് ജനാധിപത്യത്തിന് തിരിച്ചടിയാണ്.]

For many respondents, the lack of regular meetings and the disconnect between the leadership and the activists was symptomatic of "lack of transparency" that creeps into hierarchical organizations.[323] They feared that in the absence of regular meetings and the breakdown of communication among the activists of the movement, confusion would begin to emerge regarding the direction of the movement. Such ambiguity may have contributed to a section of the activists calling for disbanding the movement, around the time of the field work.

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[323] Robert Michels, <u>Political Parties: A Sociological Study of the Oligarchical Tendencies of Modern Democracy,</u> (Translated by Eden Paul and Cedar Paul), (Glencoe, Illinois: Free Press, 1958).

During the interviews, the respondents who were activists and those who were leaders expressed widely contrasting views on the direction and development of the movement. According to the activists, the lack of transparency, dialogue, and interaction among the activists was a serious weakness of the movement. On the other hand, many leaders tended to celebrate the resulting "spontaneity" of the movement. A leader admitted that despite the movement lacking resource at various stages, there was no effort to keep accounts of their flow and use:

> "We almost had a very liberal [sic], decentralized form of organization. The committees did not have any particular structure. We didn't even feel the need to keep any accounts of transactions. As far as meetings were concerned, we did not follow the formal procedures such as keeping a minute book. So, it was a loosely structured organization."

> [ഈ സമരത്തില് വളരെ ലിബറലായ, വികേന്ദ്രീകരിച്ച സമ്ഘടനാക്രമമാണണ്ടായൊരുന്നത്. കമ്മിറ്റികൾക്ക് പ്രത്യേക ഘടനയൊന്നുമുണ്ടായിരുന്നില്ല. ശരിക്കും പറഞ്ഞാല് ഈ സമരത്തില് അക്കൗണ്ട്പോല്യം വക്കണ്ടതിന്റെ ആവശ്യകത ഞങ്ങൾക്ക് തോന്നിയില്ല. മീറ്റിങ്ങുകളെ സംബന്ധിച്ചിടത്തോളം ഫോറ്മലായിട്ടുള്ള രീതികളൊന്നമില്ലായിരുന്ന. മിനട്ട്സ് ബ്യക്കോ മറ്റൊ, അതിന്റെയൊന്നും ആവശ്യകത തോന്നിയില്ല. ആകെയൊര ല്യസായ സമ്ഘടനാരീതിയായിരുന്ന.]

According to this leader, in the "collective" organizational structure was "kept to a minimum." He added:

> If we had to file a suit in the High Court, a few of us would get together and make a decision and go ahead. So, we didn't really have the character of a formal organization like in the mainstream political parties. There was no code of conduct, no emphasis on majority decision making, nothing of that sort. Everything was based on a consensus.

> [ഉദാഹരണത്തിന്, ഹൈക്കോടതിയില് കേസ് ഫയല് ചെയ്യണമെങ്കില് ഞങ്ങളില് കുറച്ചപേര് ചേറ്ന്ന് തീരുമാനങ്ങള് എടുത്ത് മുൻപോട്ട് പോകും. സാധാരണ രാഷ്ട്രീയ പാറ്ട്ടികളെ പോലെ ഞങ്ങൾക്ക് ഫോറ്മല് സമ്ഘടനകളടെ ഒരു സ്വഭാവരീതിയുമില്ലായിരുന്ന. ഒരു കോഡ് ഓഫ് കണ്ടക്ടോ,

ഭ്രിഭാഗത്തിന്റെ അടിസ്ഥാനത്തില് തീരുമാനങ്ങള് എടുക്കുക അങ്ങിനെ പ്രത്യേക ചിട്ടവട്ടങ്ങളൊന്നുമില്ലായിരുന്നു. എല്ലാം ഒരു കൂട്ടായ്മയുടെ അടിസ്ഥാനത്തിലാണ് നടന്നത്.]

When asked how the "consensus-building" process played out within the movement, this person said: "Consensus was purely on the basis of issues. It was always on the basis of an understanding of the concrete situation. What had to happen in a concrete situation would happen." [കണ്സെന്സസ് ശരിക്കും ഇഷ്യൂസിന്റെ അടിസ്ഥാനത്തില് മാത്രമാണ്. അപ്പോഴും സാഹചര്യത്തെ വ്യക്തമാക്കി മനസ്സിലാക്കിയതിനുശേഷമാണ് തീരുമാനങ്ങള് എടുത്തിരുന്നത്. ഒരു സാഹചര്യത്തില് കോണ്ക്രീറ്റായി എന്തു ചെയ്യണോ അതായിരുന്നു ഞങ്ങള് ചെയ്യാന് തീരുമാനിച്ചിരുന്നത്.] While emphasizing the "loose structure" of the movement, many leaders claimed that the movement was "spontaneous." According to them, "spontaneity" is equated with "lack of formal organizational structures." Such claims are made against the background of the recent theoretical position that formal organizational structures, while working along the lines of bureaucracy and representing instrumental rationality, are not conducive to counter-hegemonic social movements.[324] However, it should be noted, as opposed to formal organizations that may limit the scope of social movements, the key issue in Plachimada was that in the absence of regular interaction among activists– through formal or informal channels – decision-making powers were often vested with the leadership, with the rest merely following orders.

A respondent pointed out that after the initial phase of the movement, when it sought to capture the popular imagination, consolidation was necessary. How the movement chose to consolidate would impact eventually its character. An activist critical

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[324] Theories of New Social Movements, discussed in chapter 2, have advanced such a position.

of civil society leadership argued that: "Devising these strategies that are based on mutual support and geared towards promoting self reliance among the community members would have helped it consolidate and strengthen in a very democratic way." [പരസ്പര സഹായത്തിലും സ്വയം പര്യാപ്തത അവിടത്തെ ആൾക്കാരില് ഉണ്ടാക്കാനതകുന്ന രീതിയില് സമരം മുൻപോട്ട് പോയിരുന്നെങ്കില് അത് സമരത്തെ തന്നെ ജനാധിപത്യപരമായി ശക്തിപ്പെടുത്താന് സഹായിച്ചേനെ.] Such practices should be geared to developing trust, not only among activists but also between the movement and local people. This respondent pointed out that such practices based on trust, which in turn are built dialogue and transparency, can further solidarity. As a result, the movement had the potential to win credibility in the public sphere. According to this respondent, the movement leadership should have attempted to develop trust, which is the basis for solidarity:

> For trust to develop, activities as part of the movement have to increase the collective spirit among the movement participants. Transparency as far as dissemination of information on the one hand, and efforts from the leadership to minimize the differentiation between the leadership and the others are important aspects that can win the confidence of people. Another important question was handling financial resources. If care was made to declare the accounts and such activities in the general body meetings of the movement, that would have gone a long way in establishing trust.

> [വിശ്വാസം വികസിപ്പിക്കുവാന്, സമരത്തിന്റെ ഭാഗമായി ചെയ്യുന്ന കാര്യങ്ങളില് കൂട്ടായ്മയും പങ്കാളിത്തവും കൂടുതല് വളര്ത്തണം. അത് വളര്ത്താനുള്ള അറിവോടെയുള്ള ശ്രമങ്ങള് നടക്കണം. തീരുമാനങ്ങള് എടുക്കുന്നതിലും അത് എല്ലാ ആൾക്കാരിലേക്കും എത്തിക്കുന്നതിലും നേതൃത്വം സുതാര്യത കൊണ്ടുവരണം. അങ്ങിനെയുള്ള സമ്ഘടനാപ്രവര്ത്തനം നേതൃത്വവും സാധാരണ ആൾക്കാരും തമ്മിലുള്ള വ്യതാസം ഇല്ലാതാക്കും. ഇതെല്ലാം തീറ്ച്ചയായും ആൾക്കാരുടെ വിശ്വാസം നേടിയെടുക്കാന് സഹായിക്കും. മറ്റൊരു പ്രധാന കാര്യം എങ്ങിനെയാണ് സാമ്പത്തിക കാര്യങ്ങള് കൈകാര്യം ചെയ്യുന്നത് എന്നതിനെപ്പറ്റിയാണ്. അക്കൌണ്ട് വയ്ക്കുന്നതിലും അത് സ്ഥിരമായി മീറ്റിങ്ങുകളില് അവതരിപ്പിക്കുന്നതിലും ശ്രദ്ധ ചെലുത്തിയിരുന്നെങ്കില്, അത് സാധാരണ ആൾക്കാരില് വിശ്വാസം വളര്ത്താന് ധാരാളം സഹായിച്ചേനെ.]

Contrary to the claims of the leadership that the movement remained spontaneous even as it advanced, some respondents reported "internal bickering" as persons and organizations, particularly in leadership positions, attempted to advance their self-interests. "Those with independent modes of thinking and those who did not agree with the leadership were marginalized," according to one respondent. [സ്വതന്ത്രമായി ചിന്തിക്കുന്നവരും നേതൃത്വവുമായി ചില തീരുമാനങ്ങളില് യോജിക്കാത്തവരെയും സമരതീരുമാനങ്ങളെടുക്കുന്നതില് നിന്ന് ഒഴിവാക്കി.] This charge was confirmed by several other respondents, who spoke about their thwarted efforts at making the leadership more accountable to the movement. According to them, the tenor of the activity promoted by the civil society leadership in the movement mirrored the strategies of mobilization and organizational patterns of the mainstream political parties. Among supporters of the movement were individuals who were critical of the way the civil society leadership molded the movement. One of them commented as follows:

> Decision making was not collective… Those who wanted to take the movement seriously and build it up in a protracted way were marginalized. All these further narrowed decision making processes and vested powers in a few. It was more like, on the basis of a prevailing situation, they would add some people and take off some – depending upon their interests. That's how these committees operated. And that is perhaps why the movement ended up being what it is.

[തീരുമാനങ്ങള് എടുത്തിരുന്നത് കൂട്ടായ രീതിയിലല്ലായിരുന്നു. ഈ സമരം ഗൌരവമായെടുത്ത് ജനങ്ങളുമായി സമ്വാദത്തിലേര്പ്പെട്ട് ഒരു ധീറ്ഘകാല സമരം നടത്താന് ശ്രമിച്ചവരെ നേതൃത്വം മാറ്റി നിറുത്തി. ഇങ്ങനെയുണ്ടായ പ്രശ്നങ്ങള് പിന്നെയും കേന്ദ്രീകരണത്തിനുള്ള പ്രവണതകള്ക്ക് ആക്കം കൂട്ടി. എങിനെയായിരുന്ന വച്ചാല്, ഒരു ചെറിയ കൂട്ടം ആള്ക്കാര് നേതൃത്വത്തില് ഇരുന്നു. സാഹചര്യത്തിന്റെയും താല്പര്യങ്ങളുടെയും അടിസ്ഥാനത്തില് അവര് ചിലപ്പോല് ചിലരെ കൂട്ടുകയും ചിലരെ അകത്തി നിരത്തുകയും ചെയ്തു. അങ്ങിനെയാണ് ഈ കമ്മിറ്റികള് നടന്നിരുന്നത്. ഒരു പക്ഷെ അതു കൊണ്ടാവാം സമരം അവസാനം ഇങ്ങനെയായത്.]

Typically, when a social movement emerges to address particular social problems, the local leaders of the mainstream political parties attempt to "take over" or "sponsor" it.[325] As the Plachimada movement advanced, an organization called National Alliance for People's Movements (NAPM) decided to become its "sponsor."[326] In "sponsoring" a social movement, a civil society organization or political party seeks to align the interests of the former with the latter. While inter-movement dialogue and building solidarity may be important to advancing people's politics, the language and practice of "sponsoring," without concrete discussions among the activists, works to the contrary. Many respondents remarked that they were upset with such "self-serving" forms of activism. A local activist summed up the mood: "What converged here were interests and the core issues often got lost." [ഇവിടെ കുടിച്ചേറ്ന്നത് വ്യക്തിപരമായ താല്പര്യങ്ങളായിരുന്നു. അതിനിടെ ശരിക്കുള്ള പ്രശ്ങ്ങള് തഴയപ്പെട്ടു.]

Several of the respondents had been part of ongoing social movements or people's struggles in Kerala for some time. Some of them expressed pessimism regarding the civil society initiatives. A respondent, who was part of civil society activism, and has been observing social movements initiated by civil society in Kerala for the last 10 years or so, reflected this pessimism,

> "What do we do? We conduct struggles, cultivate them, and keep them going for a time. The issues raised are important. However, they never succeed. Apart from closing down a factory or a plant, they haven't been able to address fundamental social problems in Kerala. As a result of this inability, not much changes. Newer problems come up all the time and they take up these. The conditions of the people who suffer from these problems haven't changed much".

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[325] Haritha Bhoomi; many respondents, including a leader of NAPM who was associated with the Plachimada movement claimed 'sponsorship' of the movement.

[326] Many respondents attested to the claim made that NAPM decided to 'sponsor' the movement

[നമ്മളെന്താ ചെയ്യുന്നത്? നമ്മള് സമരം നടത്തും, ഉന്തിയും തള്ളിയും കുറെ സമയത്തേയ്ക്ക് അത് മുൻപോട്ട് കൊണ്ടുപോകും. തീർച്ചയായയും ഉയർത്തപ്പെടുന്ന പ്രശ്നങ്ങള് ഗൌരവമുള്ളവയാണ്. പക്ഷെ ഈ സമരങ്ങള് ഒരിക്കലും വിജയിക്കാറില്ല. പ്ലാച്ചിമടയില്പ്പോലും, ഫക്ടറി അടയ്ക്കുന്നതല്ലാതെ, അവിടത്തെ അല്ലെങ്കില് കേരളത്തിലെ അടിസ്ഥാന പ്രശ്നങ്ങള് ഉന്നയിക്കാന് അവറ്ക്ക് കഴിഞ്ഞില്ല. ഇങ്ങനെയുള്ള പ്രശ്നങ്ങള് കാരണം അടിസ്ഥാനപരമായി അധികമൊന്നും മാറ്റുന്നില്ല. അതിനാല്, എപ്പോഴും പുതിയ പ്രശ്നങ്ങള് വന്നോണ്ടേയിരിക്കും അത് ഏറ്റെടുക്കാന് ആൾക്കാരും കാണും. പക്ഷെ, ഇതെല്ലാം അനുഭവിക്കുന്ന ആൾക്കാരുടെ സ്ഥിതിയില് യാതൊരു മാറ്റവ്വമില്ല.]

Many respondents agreed that in the case of Plachimada, with regard to organization and leadership, the influence of civil society was decisive in leading the movement from participatory action to dependency. The civil society leadership, instead of encouraging mobilization of local people, confined its activities to winning over the state to support the movement in the legal battle with the HCCB. As a result, the creative potential of the social movement in effecting substantial social change toward democratization was inhibited. In the process, the social movement could not continue the initial dialogue with local people and communities and establish organizational forms based on participatory action. In the end, while the leadership felt successful in getting the government to temporarily close down the plant, the local activists who had initiated the movement were despondent that their struggles did not address the fundamental problems concerning their collective existence.

Resource Mobilization and Social Capital in the Plachimada Movement: A Critique

As Resource Mobilization approach has pointed out, the way resources are generated in a social movement can potentially determine its course. Broadly, there are two ways of generating resources for a movement. These elements required for its functioning may be generated from within the movement. Conversely, a social movement may depend on external sources for important resources. A social movement also, in the course of its development, often seeks to define collectively what constitutes necessary resources. In a social movement, resources[327] can be broadly understood as material goods – money, food, or other required factors to sustain a movement – and cultural elements, or what has been termed "social capital."[328] The proposition explored in this section is that the way in which resources are defined has important consequences for the direction of a movement.

In the case of the social movement under consideration, most of the initial activists were poor tribal people of Plachimada and nearby colonies who were employed as agricultural workers. In a traditional sense, they constitute a resource-strapped community. Many respondents lamented that giving up a day's work to participate in the movement was a big drain on their resources. Therefore, the question of mobilization became more complicated in the light of onslaught by the state – particularly by the police who often pressed falsely criminal charges against the movement activists. When

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[327] RM has discussed these issues in detail. For a programmatic statement of RM, see McCarthy and Zald, "Resource Mobilization and Social Movements: A Partial Theory"; Also, following the work of Putnam there has been a profusion of scholarly work that links social capital and civil society with democratization; Robert Putnam, Democracies in Flux: The Evolution of Social Capital in Contemporary Society. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002).

[328] David Halpern, Social Capital, (Cambridge, UK, Malden, Massachussetts: Polity Press, 2005); Anthony Bebbington (Ed.), The Search for Empowerment: Social Capital as Idea and Practice at the World Bank, Bloomfield, CT, Kumarian Press, 2006).

facing these charges, many of the activists found it difficult to raise the funds to attend court, particularly in their context of being unemployed. Hence right from the initial stages, the Plachimada movement had to address the question of mobilizing resources to organize the struggles.

One of the debates within the movement was about the nature of resources and how to mobilize these elements. In terms of the material considerations, one of the imperatives was to generate enough resources to feed the activists who were foregoing work to be part of the movement. An activist who was associated with a fringe political group associated with the movement in the beginning confided:

> "At the beginning, resources were scarce. The local people only had the will to struggle. So, at that stage, we used to contribute whatever we had, despite our own lack of resources. Some would bring rice, some vegetables, fruits etc. that are locally available and grown in the yards. However, those used to be sufficient. We managed with minimum things and that's how the people lived and struggled. That kind of struggle had a lot of strength."

> [ആദ്യമൊക്കെ വിഭവങ്ങള് വളരെക്കുറവായിരുന്നു. തദ്ദേശവാസികൾക്ക് സമരം ചെയ്യാനുള്ള മനസ്സുമാത്രമേ ഉണ്ടായിരുന്നുള്ളൂ. ആകാലഘട്ടത്തില് എല്ലാവരും അവറ്ക്ക് കൊണ്ടുവരാൻപറ്റുന്നത് കൊടുക്കുകയായിരുന്നു. പലരുടെയും വീട്ടില് അധികമൊന്നുമില്ലെങ്കില് കൂടി. ചിലര് അരി കൊണ്ടുവരും, ചിലര് പഴങ്ങളോ, പച്ചക്കറികളോ ഒക്കെ, അവരവരുടെ വീട്ടില് വളരുന്നത്. അത്രമതിയായിരുന്നു. ബുദ്ധിമുട്ടായിരുന്നെങ്കിലും അതുവച്ച് സമരം വളരെ ശക്തിയായി മുൻപോട്ട് പോയി. അങ്ങിനെയുള്ള സമരത്തിന് ചുറ്റും ശക്തിയുമുണ്ടായിരുന്നു.]

Many respondents who had been part of the protest from the initial stages pointed out that resources were mobilized internally, and the movement was characterized by high levels of solidarity among its activists and the resolve to continue with the struggle against odds. From these initial experiences, many activists realized that resource mobilization should be done in a way that contributes to the morale of the activists by

increasing their levels of participation. A civil society activist who was critical of the tendency to depend upon large donors stated:

> In the initial stages of the struggle in Plachimada, many of us had suggested ways of organizing and activities that would be geared towards increasing the self-confidence and the morale of the people of Plachimada. Accordingly, we had proposed alternative ways of resource mobilization. We don't necessarily have to depend upon large donors. We could go to the people of Palakkad and interact with them informing them and engaging with them in debates on what is going on in Plachimada, in the process seek contributions. Thus, we could have gathered resources as part of movement activity itself.

> [ആദ്യകാലത്തൊക്കെ ആൾക്കാരുടെ ധൈര്യവും വിശ്വാസവും വളറ്ത്താനുള്ള രീതിയില്ലുള്ള പ്രവറ്ത്തനശൈലി വേണമെന്ന ഞങ്ങളില് പലരും പറഞ്ഞു. അതിനായി, ഞങ്ങള് വേറെ പല രീതിയില് എങ്ങിനെ ആവശ്യമുള്ള വിഭവങ്ങള് സ്വരൂക്കൂട്ടാമെന്നുള്ളതിനെ പറ്റി അഭിപ്രായങ്ങള് പറഞ്ഞുകൊണ്ടേയിരുന്നു. വിഭവങ്ങൾക്കായി അധികം കാശൊള്ളവരുടെ അടുത്തേക്ക് പൊകണ്ടാവശ്യമില്ല. നമ്മൾക്ക് പാലക്കാട്ടെ സാധാരണ ജനങ്ങളുടെ ഇടയില് പോയി അവരോട് പ്ളാച്ചിമടയിലെ പ്രശ്നത്തെപ്പറ്റി പരഞ്ഞ് അവരുമായി സമ്വദിച്ച്, ചെറിയ ചെറിയ സമ്ഭാവനകള് സ്വീകരിക്കാമ്. അങ്ങിനെ സമരത്തിനാവശ്യമായ വിഭവങ്ങള് സമരത്തിനെ പറ്റി ജനങ്ങളെ ബോധവാന്മാരിക്കൊണ്ട് കൈപ്പറ്റാമായിരുന്നു.]

Activists who were critical of the movement thought that, although there was some visibility at the national and international levels, it did not really have significant impact at a local level – particularly in the areas surrounding Plachimada in Palakkad district. They believed that if this protesthad focused on expanding conversations at the local level, the question of sustaining the movement would not have been problematic.

However, partly due to the attack on the movement by the politicians, and also the reluctance of the leadership to ensure self-reliance and a participatory style of functioning, the focus shifted from internal resource mobilization to seeking them elsewhere. In this context, the movement leadership decided to tap into the network of civil society activists in Kerala. As the movement progressed, support of civil society activists, who were not members of the community in Plachimada but backed the

movement, became instrumental in raising the important resources. As a civil society activist in a leadership role described:

> The movement was initially started by the struggle committee – mainly the tribal people. They had a lot of limitations. As it started emerging as a bigger struggle, they required more resources – funds, food etc. The solidarity committee was formed to try and provide all these. Often, the voluntary organizations that are part of the solidarity committee have been instrumental in mobilizing resources for the movement. In fact, this movement actually got to a level of large scale mobilizing after the solidarity committee came into effect. Apart from their own strength, they managed to bring along the political parties to support and help the movement. Remember that the political parties were initially opposed to the movement. The civil society activists played a crucial role in gaining their support for the movement.

> [സമരം തുടങ്ങിയപ്പോള് കൊക്കക്കോള വിരുദ്ധ സമരസമിതി രൂപീകരിച്ചു. ഇത് തുടങ്ങിയത് സ്ഥലത്തെ ആദിവാസി ജനങ്ങളായിരുന്നു. ഈ സമയത് ധാരാളം പോരായ്മകളുണ്ടായിരുന്നു. സമരം വല്യതായിത്തുടങ്ങിയപ്പോള് അവറ്ക്ക് കൂടുതല് വിഭവങ്ങളാവശ്യമായി വന്നു -- ആഹാരം, കാശ്, മുതലായവ. ഇതെല്ലാം എത്തിച്ചുകൊട്ടക്കാന് സഹായിക്കാനായാണ് ഐക്യദാറ്ഢ്യ സമിതി ഉണ്ടാക്കിയത്. മിക്കവാറും, ഇതിന്റെ ഭാഗമായുണ്ടായിരുന്ന സന്നദ്ധസമ്ഘടനകള് സമരത്തിനാവശ്യമായ വിഭവങ്ങള് കൊണ്ടുവരുന്നതിനായി വളരെ പ്രധാന പങ്കുവഹിച്ചു. ശരിക്കും പറഞ്ഞാല് ഈ സമരം വളറ്ന്ന് വല്യതായതും കൂടുതല് ആളാള്ക്കാര് ഇതിനെക്കുറിച്ച് അറിയാന് തുടങ്ങിയതും, ആള്ക്കാര് വരാത്തുടങ്ങിയതുമെല്ലാം ഐക്യദാറ്ഢ്യസമതി രൂപീകരിച്ചതിനുശേഷമാണ്. ഇതെല്ലാം കൂടാതെ, അവര് രാഷ്ട്രീയ പാറ്ട്ടികളുടെ പിന്തുണയും നേടിത്തന്നു. ആദ്യകാലത്ത് രാഷ്ട്രീയ പാറ്ട്ടികള് ഈ സമരത്തെ എതിറ്ത്തിരുന്നു എന്ന് ഓറ്ക്കണം. അങ്ങിനെ സിവില് സമൂഹത്തിലെ ആള്ക്കാര് ഈ സമരത്തിന് ജനപിന്തുണനേടുന്നതില് വലിയ പങ്കുവഹിച്ചു.]

With the increased role of the civil society in the movement, the voluntary organizations took turns to organize protest meetings in Plachimada on a regular basis. A local person who participated in these meetings reported:

> "At the end of these meetings, they would make a contribution to the movement. Often the contribution would be in the form of money which they gave to the leaders of the Struggle Committee. In some other cases, they distributed rice and other resources",

[മീറ്റിങ്ങിനശേഷം അവര് സമരത്തിനായി എന്തെങ്കിലും സംഭാവന തരും. സാധാരണയായി, അത് കാശായിരിക്കും. അവരത് സമരനേതാക്കൾക്കാറ്ക്കെങ്കില്ം കൊടുക്കും. ചിലപ്പോള് അരി അല്ലെങ്കില് മറ്റുള്ളതെന്തെങ്കില്ം സംഭാവന കിട്ടമായിരുന്നു.]

As the movement advanced, solidarity committees were established in all districts of Kerala by the well-wishers of this struggle. Time and again, struggle committee leadership was invited to these different districts in Kerala, whereby the local supporters would collect funds and other resources and hand them over to the leaders.

Another crucial resource that was thought to be lacking in the tribal communities was social capital, which many believed was rectified through the increased role of civil society leaders in the movement. In the recent writings on democracy and social change, social capital has figured prominently as a "characteristic" that has the potential of contributing to social citizenship.[329] The idea is that as the social capital of a community increases, everyone is better equipped to engage in democratic processes. Thus, instead of understanding social capital as a "relation" (as all forms of 'capital' are understood as particular forms of social relations), mainstream writers treat this construct as a quality or thing that is readily available for appropriation by individuals, groups, and communities.[330] This recent emphasis on social capital is contemporaneous with the resurgence of the role of civil society in democratic processes: civil society is the sphere of associational life is where "values, trust and networks" – the constituting elements of social capital, according to Putnam[331] and Coleman[332] – emerge. On the contrary,

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[329] Sophie Body-Gendrot, Marilyn Gitten (Ed.), Social Capital and Social Citizenship, (Oxford, UK: Lexington Books, 2003).

[330] Ibid.

[331] Putnam, Democracies in Flux.

Bourdieu's critical approach unravels the way social capital works in reproducing the hierarchies of power and privilege in society. Bourdieu defines social capital as

> "… the aggregate of the actual or potential resources which are linked to possession of a durable network of more or less institutionalized relationships of mutual acquaintance and recognition – or in other words, to membership in a group – which provides each of its members with the backing of the collectively-owned capital, a "credential' which entitles them to credit, in the various senses of the word."[333]

According to Bourdieu, social capital is based fundamentally on material and symbolic exchanges. Such exchanges presuppose "proximity" (not necessarily physical or geographical alone) and "connectedness," although social capital should not be reduced to such proximity. Hence those who are "well connected" are expected to have better "social capital." Thus, writes Bourdieu,

> "although it is relatively irreducible to the economic and cultural capital possessed by a given agent, or even by the whole set of agents to whom he is connected, social capital is never completely independent of it because the exchanges instituting mutual acknowledgment presuppose the reacknowledgment of a minimum of objective homogeneity, and because it exerts a multiplier effect on the capital he possesses in his own right."[334]

These linkages that constitute social capital require real "investment" –time and other resources. In this regard, he uses the idea of gift exchanges in the work of Marcel Mauss to explain the way social capital is built: unlike in economic exchanges whereby goods that are assumed to be of equal value are exchanged, investments made as part of social capital are expected to reap profits in course of time.

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[332] James S. Coleman, "Social Capital in the Creation of Human Capital" in <u>American Journal of Sociology</u> (1988, 94), pp. 595-620

[333] Pierre Bourdieu, "The Forms of Capital" in J. C. Richardson (Ed.), <u>Handbook of Theory and Research of the Sociology of Education,</u> (New York: Greenwood Press, 1986), Pp. 241-58; p. 248.

[334] <u>Ibid.</u>; p.249

Most important is that Bourdieu, in analyzing social capital, is critical of its functions in society. Simply put, the working of social capital preserves the *status quo* relations of power through processes of exclusion and by preventing social criticism. Emphasizing that social capital is a vital "resource" can be detrimental to social movements that seek social transformation through criticism and reflexive action. Social capital, like all other forms, is premised on scarcity. As such, not all individuals can have access to networks of social capital. Bourdieu points out that cultural and economic capital are in crucial ways aligned with social capital – i.e., only those with high levels of the former will have access to important networks of social capital. Thus, social capital, as social relations, perpetuates hegemony and the maintenance of privilege along the lines of class, race/caste, and gender. Therefore, counter-hegemonic movements can be expected to engage in reflexive activity aimed at unraveling and submitting to severe criticism the very working of social capital – as it is reproduced in everyday activities – through the practices of a social movement.

Many respondents pointed out that instead of providing opportunities for such critique, the way Plachimada movement advanced, particularly in its civil society phase, led to dependence on external resources. The very approach of the civil society agents in Plachimada has been to "provide" resources, including social capital in the form of access to the media, higher echelons of decision making within the state, and the leadership of political parties and civil society from within India and abroad. Many respondents pointed out that while having access to these in-themselves was not a problem, the resulting dependence on civil society and political leadership to "get things done," at the cost of sustained mobilization and encouragement of active participation and self-

reliance, hurt the movement. Social capital came with a pedagogical function: since the local people were seen as not well versed in the ways of the political and legal systems, and in cultivating the media, they required the support and leadership of the civil society actors who could socialize them into the "mainstream" and facilitate their aims. In a nutshell, seeking social capital came at the cost of building local solidarity and reflexive collective action.

Interestingly, many respondents spoke about how the movement, which was "weak" to begin with, was strengthened through the involvement of civil society leaders from across India and abroad. A civil society leader claimed: "A decisive shift for the movement came when the 'desh bachao, desh banao'[335] rally took off from Plachimada." [ദേശ് ബചാവോ ദേശ് ബനാവോ റാലി പ്ളാച്ചിമടയിൽനിന്ന് ആരംഭിച്ചത് സമരത്തിന് ധാരാളം ഉന്മേഷം നല്ലി.] The national rally referred to here was undertaken by Medha Patkar, a prominent leader of Narmada Bachao Andolan (NBA), a civil society movement against the construction of big dams that has displace people from several villages in India. While this rally at Plachimada, as a mark of solidarity with its struggling people, did enhance the visibility of the movement, the implication of referring to it as a "decisive shift" detracts from the significance of local mobilization.

With the advancement of the movement, and increased participation of civil society, resources became increasingly available. With the increased role of civil society activists in contributing to movement activity, some of them emerged in leadership roles. However, many respondents were concerned that with the imperative of resource mobilization taking center stage, democratic participation within and the focus on the

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[335] "Desh bachao, desh banao" was a slogan used and it translates to "save the nation, build the nation."

purpose of the movement suffered along with the goal of building social solidarity. The movement activists critical of this turn of events pointed out that instead of empowering the local population, seeking resources elsewhere resulted in dependence that proved to be detrimental to the movement.

As a result of civil society participation, the movement leadership became increasingly "media savvy." While the first few months saw the mainstream media barring one newspaper, ignore the movement, in the latter years the struggle made headlines almost everyday – both in television and print, thus making Plachimada a household name in Kerala. With the support of the Panchayat, and some political leaders leading up to the general elections, legal teams were organized to represent the water problem in the courts. The airing of a report by BBC Radio 4, which indicated the presence of dangerous levels of heavy metals like cadmium and lead in the sludge and ground water in Plachimada, provided further strengthened public opinion in favor of the movement.[336]

A civil society leader emphasized that "advocacy" of the movement by intellectuals helped win over politicians:

> "We felt that [the leader's] advocacy of the movement will be helpful in winning over the likes of [a prominent political leader in Kerala] who had already written books and taken a public stance against globalization and the exploitative terms of WTO and other organizations."

> [[ഈ നേതാവ്] സമരത്തിന്റെ ഭാഗമാകുന്നതും അതിനുവേണ്ടി സംസാരിക്കുകയും എഴുതുകയും ചെയ്യുന്നത് ആഗോളവല്ലരണത്തെയും, ഡബ്ശ്യു ടി ഒ മുതലായ സംഘടനകളുടെ ചൂഷണത്തിനെതിരെ എഴുതുകയും പ്രസംഗിക്കുകയും ചെയ്യുന്ന വേറെ പല പ്രമുഖരായ നേതാക്കളെയും സമരത്തോടടുപ്പിക്കുന്നതില് സഹായിക്കും എന്നുഞങ്ങള്ക്ക് തോന്നി.]

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[336] www.countercurrents.org

Many activists started believing that the movement was developing primarily because of the involvement of popular leaders. Accordingly, they were less inclined to trust of their own abilities and contributions to the movement:

> Initially there was the all India march by Medha Patkar. During the march, she publicized our struggle all over. Then many people started coming over to Plachimada and that strengthened the movement. That is how it developed. Initially only one newspaper was writing about the struggle. But after Medha's coming here, everybody started writing about us and extending support.
>
> [ആദ്യം മേധ പട്കര് നയിച്ച ആള് ഇൻഡ്യ മാറ്ച്ച് നടത്തി. ഈ മാറ്ച്ച് പോയടത്തെല്ലാം പ്ളാച്ചിമട സമരത്തെ പറ്റി അവര് സംസാരിച്ചു. പിന്നീട്, ധാരാളം ആൾക്കാര് പ്ളാച്ചിമടയിലേക്ക് വരാന് തുടങ്ങി. ഇത് സമരത്തെ വളരെ സഹായിച്ചു. അങ്ങിനെയാണ് സമരം വളറ്ന്നത്. ആദ്യം ഒരു പത്രം മാത്രമെ ഈ സമരത്തെപ്പറ്റി എഴുതിയുള്ളൂ. പക്ഷെ മേധ ഇവിടെ വന്നതിനുശെഷം എല്ലാവരും എഴുതാനും സമരത്തെ പിന്തുണക്കാന് തുടങ്ങി.]

Thus, as a respondent pointed out, the movement became increasingly conducted through the media, with a penchant for the spectacle[337], including "systemic" channels such as the state, judiciary, and political parties. On the other hand, since the protest gained high levels of public acceptability in Kerala, many organizations sought to cash in on its popularity by claiming to be the "organizers" and "representatives" of the movement. These particular interests set off power struggles that in the end debilitated the movement.

Around the time of interviews, the morale of those in the movement was sagging and the leadership seemed to depend on the state and politicians to meet the narrowly defined "need" – i.e., to ensure that the plant remained closed. A respondent, who

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[337] Guy Debord analyzed the nature of alienation and links it to reification in contemporary society that, according to him, is a product of 'the spectacle.' In such societies that place primacy on the spectacle, As Debord said, social relations are mediated by images. See Guy Debord, The Society of the Spectacle, (New York: Zone Books, 1994). Such mediations, characterized by reification, can be debilitating for a movement with counter-hegemonic aspirations.

claimed to have been consistently pushing the movement leadership to explore alternatives, declared: "We don't have to disband the movement for the government to do anything either way. In fact, there are enough resources in Plachimada itself that can help sustain the movement. The important thing is to tap them." [ഗവണ്മെന്റിനെക്കൊണ്ട് എന്തെങ്കിലും ചെയ്യിക്കാന് നമ്മള് സമരം പിരിച്ചവിടണ്ടാവശ്യമില്ല. ശരിക്കം പറഞ്ഞാല് സമരം മുന്നോട്ട് കൊണ്ടുപോകാനാവശ്യമായ വിഭവങ്ങള് പ്ളാച്ചിമടയില് തന്നെയുണ്ട്. അവ ഉപയോഗപ്പെടുത്തുകയാണ് വേണ്ടത്.]

Many respondents rued the fact that the movement, in giving in to the lure of civil society without considering the possible ramifications, gave up on the principle of self-reliance and striving for self-determination.[338] Many activists believed that if self-reliance was practiced within the movement, particularly in the context of generating of resources, a decisive political victory could have been achieved:

> "Our suggestions were based on the understanding that we were increasingly depending upon those organizations that were helping us with resources. Such dependency had the potential of weakening the movement itself. So, our idea was based on principles of collective self help and self-reliance. We were confident that a lot of resources could be mobilized from within the community and the movement participants itself, but in the process helping those within the community achieve some level of self-reliance. The crucial aspect was that their existence that is based on dependency towards structures that in a way is not good for them. That had to stop."

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[338] Several writers on democratization have written about how meaningful democracy is linked to promoting self-reliance and self-determination. Prominent among them are writers such as Markovic and Stojanovic of the Praxis School in former Yugoslavia. They emphasized self-management, as seen in worker self-management, as a way to promote self-reliance that is crucial to meaningful and participatory democracy. See , Mihailo Markovic, From Affluence to Praxis: Philosophy and Social Criticism, (Ann Arbor, MI: The University of Michigan Press, 1974); Gerson S. Sher, (Ed. and trans.) Marxist Humanism and Praxis, Buffalo: Prometheus Books, 1978); David A. Crocker, Praxis and Democratic Socialism: The Critical Social Theory of Markovic and Stojanovic, (New Jersey: Humanities Press, 1983).

[സമരത്തെ സഹായിക്കാന് മുന്പോട്ട വന്ന സംഘടനകളോട് വിധേയത്വമുണ്ടായിവരുന്നു എന്ന കാഴ്ച്ചപ്പാടിന്റെ അടിസ്ഥാനത്തിലാണ് ഞങ്ങള് ചില അഭിപ്രായങ്ങള് മുന്പോട്ട് വച്ചത്. അമ്മാതിരിയുള്ള വിധേയത്വങ്ങള് സമരത്തെ പ്രതികൂലമായിബാധിക്കുമെന്ന തോന്നി. ഞങ്ങളുടെ സമരത്തെ കുറിച്ചുള്ള കാഴ്ച്ചപ്പാട് സ്വസഹായത്തിന്റെയും സെല്ഫ് റിലയന്സിന്റെയും അടിസ്ഥാനത്തിലുണ്ടാകുന്ന കൂട്ടായ്മകളിലൂടെയാണ്. ആദിവാസിസമുദായത്തില്ലും സമരത്തില് പങ്കെടുത്തവരില്നിന്നും നമുക്ക് ആവശ്യത്തിന് വിഭവങ്ങള് സ്വരുക്കൂട്ടാം, അങ്ങിനെ ചെയ്യുമ്പോള് അവരില് ആത്മവിശ്വാസവും സ്വന്തം കഴിവില് വിശ്വാസവും വളര്ത്താന് പറ്റും. ഈ സമരത്തിന്റെ ഒരു പ്രധാനകാര്യമെന്തെന്നാല് സമരവും ആദിവാസികളുടെ ജീവിതവും അവരെ ചൂഷണം ചെയ്യുന്ന ഘടനകളുടെമേല്ലുള്ള വിധേയത്വത്തെ പ്രതിയായിരുന്നു. ചൂഷണത്തെ ചെറുക്കുന്നതിന് വിധേയത്വം നിറുത്തണം.]

These activists suggested that the movement put in place a work-sharing mechanism, whereby those who go to work on a given day would share their incomes with those engaged in movement activities. Some others had suggested the idea of collective kitchens to feed the movement activists. "Such forms of employment exchange and cultural exchange would also help many conscientious people in the society to join hands with the movement and be part of it." [അങ്ങിനെയുള്ള എമ്പ്ളോയ്മെന്റ് എക്സ്ചേഞ്ചും കള്ച്ചറല് എക്സ്ചേഞ്ചും സമൂഹത്തില് ബോധവാന്മാരായ ജനങ്ങളെ ഇമ്മാതിരിയുള്ള ഒരു സമരവുമായി അടുപ്പിക്കുകയും അവര്ക്ക് അതിന്റെ ഭാഗമാകാന് സാധിക്കുകയും ചെയ്യും.] According to these activists, while the movement leadership agreed "in principle," they found them too "utopian to actually practice these new economic relationships." [ഈ പുതിയ സാമ്പത്തിക രീതികള് നടക്കാന്പറ്റാത്ത സ്വപ്നങ്ങളാണെന്നായിരുന്നു അവരുടെ വാദം.]

In the end, while these resources were extremely important for a social movement of poor people, their pursuit by the leadership defined crucially the direction of the movement away from democratic and participatory mobilization and consolidation at the local levels. Overwhelming emphasis on such resources was reproduced within the movement hierarchies – based on who had access to those resources – similar to those

that the local activists were committed originally to confronting. Gradually, the pursuit of resources set processes in motion that were to alter significantly the movement from its original pursuit of alternatives.

Plachimada Movement, the State, and the Political Establishment

The interaction between the "political establishment," or the mainstream political parties and their supporters, and the Plachimada movement shaped the development of the latter. The civil society leadership that gave direction to the struggle emerged gradually as a significant link between the political establishment and the movement. This section will analyze in detail how the interaction between the political society and the movement played out at various stages, and how this process influenced the direction of the protest.

Even before the movement started, the activists among the tribal people in Plachimada had long identified politicians as part of the *status quo* that sanctioned their oppression. According to various respondents, given that the tribal people were considered to lack key resources, being unmobilized and seen as unlettered, the relationship between them and local politicians was exploitative. At the same time, the tribal people were hardly at any influential level in the hierarchies of most mainstream political parties. Because of the long history of oppression that the tribal people all over India had been experiencing, the governments at the state and federal level had instituted various programs to alleviate poverty and better their conditions of existence. However, due to the nexus of the local politicians and bureaucrats, the fruits of such policies never quite reached these impoverished persons. Therefore, the political establishment, and its

dominant supporters, was seen as part of the problem by the tribal people. A tribal activist said that this awareness was an initial spur that led to the emergence of the movement:

> Many of the agents of the state, the police, the government officials etc. had been seen as exploiting the tribal people. How does the government exploit? In our developmental state, there had been a whole lot of commitment to uplifting the downtrodden – dalits and adivasis. One of the ways in which the state acted against them was by not implementing the policies designed to help them. On top of it, they had also started making laws that helped take land away from the adivasi collectivities.

> [ഭരണകൂടത്തിലെ പലതരത്തിലുള്ള ആൾക്കാര് -- പോലീസ്, ഗവണ്മെന്റ് ഉദ്യോഗസ്ഥര് മുതലായവര് -- ആദിവാസിജനങ്ങളെ പലതരത്തില് ചൂഷണം ചെയ്യാറുണ്ട്. ഗവണ്മെന്റ് എങ്ങിനെയാണ് ചൂഷണം ചെയ്യുന്നത്? വികസനത്തിന്റെ ഭാഗമായി ദളിതരും ആദിവാസികളും പോലെ താഴെക്കിടയിലുള്ളവരുടെ ഉന്നമനത്തിനായി ധാരാളം പദ്ധതികളുണ്ട്. എന്നാല് പലപ്പോഴും ഇങ്ങനെയുള്ള പദ്ധതികള് ഗവണ്മെന്റ് നടപ്പാക്കാറില്ല. അതില്പരിയായി അവര് സ്ഥിരമായി പുതിയ നിയമങ്ങള് ഉണ്ടാക്കി ആദിവാസികളുടെ ഭൂമി കൈയ്യടക്കുന്നതിനെ സഹായിക്കുന്നു.]

While the politicians, as the lawmakers, have been instrumental in generating state policies that are detrimental to the tribal people, the local politicians stood to gain from the "nexus of corruption" that existed between them and the petty bureaucrats. An activist who had spent years trying to mobilize tribal people to stand up against their oppression recalled:

> How the officials exploited them was thus: because the government had designed these policies to help uplift adivasis, even though they were not implemented, there was always fund allocation for them. Often times, such funds would be pocketed by the governmental officials. The politicians exploited the adivasis thus: they have access to the agencies of the state. As people's representatives they are duty bound to ensuring that the officials use the funds actually for the betterment of adivasis and not for their own personal uses. Often times, politicians are hand in glove with the officials, and end up sharing these funds among themselves. Beyond that, when a government announces a new scheme to support adivasis, they would become middlemen in the implementation process and take away money that was actually meant for the adivasis. So, in a way, the

state's coffers have not been of any benefit to the adivasis. Instead, in the name of adivasis a lot of others – middlemen of various types such as politicians, government officials etc. – have benefited.

[ഗവണ്മെന്റ് ഉദ്യോഗസ്ഥര് ചൂഷണം ചെയ്യുന്നത് ഇങ്ങനെയാണ്. ഗവണ്മെന്റിന്റെ പദ്ധതികള് നടപ്പാക്കിയില്ലെങ്കില്യം അതിനു വേണ്ടി മാറ്റിവച്ചിരിക്കുന്ന ഫണ്ടുണ്ട്. പലപ്പോഴും ഈ ഫണ്ട് ഉദ്യോഗസ്ഥരുടെ പോക്കറ്റിലെത്തിപ്പെടും. രാഷ്ട്രീയക്കാര് എങ്ങിനെയാണ് ചൂഷണം ചെയ്യുന്നതെന്നാല്, ഗവണ്മെന്റിന്റെ ഏജന്സികളില് അവര്ക്കുള്ള സ്വാധീനമുപയോഗിച്ചാണ്. സരിക്കമ്പറഞ്ഞാല് ജനങ്ങളുടെ പ്രതിനിധികള് എന്ന നിലക്ക് രാഷ്ട്രീയക്കാര് ഈ ഫണ്ടെല്ലാം ശരിയായി -- ആദിവാസികളുടെയും ദളിതരുടെയും ഉന്നമനത്തിനായി -- ഉപയോഗിക്കുന്നു എന്ന് ഉറപ്പവരുത്താനുള്ള കടമ അവര്ക്കുണ്ട്. മറിച്ച്, ഇവര് ഈ ഉദ്യോഗസ്ഥരുമായി ചേര്ന്ന് ഈ കാശ് തട്ടിയെടുക്കാറാണ് പതിവ്. വേറൊരു രീതി ഇങ്ങനെയാണ്. ഗവണ്മെന്റ് ആദിവാസികള്ക്ക് വേണ്ടി പുതിയ് ഒരു സ്കീം പ്രഖ്യാപിക്കുമ്പോള്, അത് നടപ്പിലാക്കുന്നതിനിടെ അവര് ഇടനിലക്കാരായി കാശ് തട്ടിയെടുക്കും. അങ്ങിനെ ശരിക്കും പറഞ്ഞാല് ഗവണ്മെന്റിന്റെ കാശ് ആദിവാസികളില് എത്താറില്ല. ആദിവാസികളുടെ പേരില് പലതരം ആള്ക്കാര് -- രാഷ്ട്രീയക്കാരും, ഉദ്യോഗസ്ഥരും -- കാശുണ്ടാക്കി.]

The amount of resources – both natural and cultural – a community commands within the liberal polity in India is an important marker of their access to power. Because the tribal people are seen as powerless and lacking resources, the interests of these communities are often unrepresented in real terms, although they are – as citizens – "formally" represented in the democratic processes. However, the state derives its power from the dominant classes and the latter's interests are often aligned with that of the state. As a result, the oppressed sections of society often find themselves excluded from the processes of the state. In this context of widespread dissatisfaction, the tribal movement began to win back the alienated land in the various tribal areas of Kerala. According to several respondents, the Plachimada movement emerged both as an expression of this general dissatisfaction and an effort to address an immediate threat to their existence as a community – the water problem.

Therefore, many of the local activists were not surprised when the first signs of opposition to the fledgling movement came from the local politicians, particularly those belonging to the mainstream left political groups. They had already learned that the decision to invite HCCB to establish a plant in Plachimada was made when the Left was ruling the state in the late 1990s. After the plant was established, those who were given jobs were the supporters of political parties and members of the trade unions affiliated with these parties. At the same time, some of the local political leaders, who were also land owners, found themselves in a situation to reap benefits from the plant.

Asked if the local politicians were suspicious of the movement in its initial days, a respondent declared:

> "They were clearly opposed to the struggle… they had organized a counter movement. They argued that it was an unnecessary movement and it was going to put people out of work. Their opposition to the movement ensured that the mainstream newspapers were also opposed to it."

[അവര് വ്യക്തമായി സമരത്തെ എതിര്‍ത്തിരുന്നു. ആദ്യം അവര് ഒരു എതിര് സമരം പോല്യുണ്ടാക്കി. അവരുടെ വാദം ഇത് ഒരു അനാവശ്യ സമരമാണെന്നും, ഇത് കൊണ്ട് ധാരാളം ജനങ്ങള് തൊഴിലില്ലാതാവുമെന്നും മറ്റുമായിരുന്നു. അവര് ഇതിനെ എതിര്‍ത്തതുകൊണ്ട് മിക്ക മാധ്യമങ്ങളും സമരത്തെ എതിര്‍ത്തു.]

Other activists also pointed out that after the movement advanced, and the political parties found it beneficial to support the struggle, the local leader of a prominent political party admitted to activists that he had committed the "mistake" of selling to the plant water taken from his land.

In rural areas, when there is a social problem, politicians tend typically to intervene in the efforts of the local people, and, in the process, assert their "right" to address the issue.[339] Such interventions are justified on the grounds that the politicians are

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[339] Many respondents pointed out that many local political leaders try to monopolize social action by claiming their 'right' to address social problems. It was also pointed out that such mechanisms are often

the representatives of people and, therefore, act in a "responsible" way by addressing the local problems. In Plachimada, even before the movement took off, the local people had come together and raised the issue of ground water pollution with the plant officials. At that stage, a local political bigwig intervened, claiming to work "on behalf of the Plachimada people" and conducted "negotiations" with the plant officials. During these negotiations, according to some residents, these officials had promised to construct bore-wells that would provide clean drinking water to the local people.

Several respondents pointed out that when this promise was not met, they got together and considered going ahead with their plan to launch the movement. The claims of the politicians to "represent" the people's problems, however, may produce many benefits. But in the case of Plachimada, such interference deflated, at least temporarily, the ability of people to mobilize themselves. On the other hand, underlying such interventions is the production of dependence of the local people on politicians that aids in the latter's pursuit of power. Apart from these considerations, intervention from "above" discourages the emergence of other avenues through which the local people can seek to address social problems. A local activist who was at the receiving end of the violence unleashed by local political leaders reinforced this point:

> The way it normally happens in these parts is like this: when we start a struggle or a movement, the local leader with some might comes up to us and asks us what our problem is. He then promises us that he will solve the problem and then we have to agree that he will solve the problem and disperse. Normally, they don't let us start a strike. This is how they disperse strikes. Of course they are able to do all these because at any given time, they are able to line up a bunch of hefty men with the promise

employed to smother the development of activists groups that may potentially challenge their power and the *status quo* in society. Therefore, politicians tend to view counter hegemonic social movements with suspicion. An activist stated that two broad types of responses are common: politicians attempt to snuff out these protests right at the beginning by attempting to discredit them and attack the activists, or co-opt them by 'taking over' and providing 'sponsorship'.

of beating us up. This mode of threatening normally means that strikes are often dissolved even before they start.

[ഇവിടെ സാധാരണയായി നടക്കാറുള്ളതിങ്ങിനെയാണ്. ഞങ്ങള് ഒരു സമരം തുടങ്ങുന്നു. ഉടനെ ഒരു ലോക്കല് നേതാവ് വന്നു ചോദിക്കും എന്താ പ്രശ്നമെന്ന്. അത് കേട്ടിട്ട് അയാള് പറയും പ്രശ്നം പരിഹരിക്കാമെന്ന്. ആപ്പോള് അയാളെ വിശ്വസിച്ച് നമ്മള് പിരിഞ്ഞ് പോകണം. സാധാരണരീതിയില് യാതൊരുകാരണവശാല്യം ഞങ്ങളെ സമരം ചെയ്യാനനുവദിക്കില്ല. പറഞ്ഞതു കേട്ടില്ലെങ്കില് അവര് ഗുണ്ടകളെ ആക്കും. ഇങ്ങിനെയാണ് അവര് സമരം പിരിച്ചുവിടുന്നത്. ഏതു സമയത്തും വരാന് റെഡിയായി കുറെ ഗുണ്ടകളും അവര്ക്കുണ്ട്. ഇതൊക്കെ കൊണ്ട്, ഇവിടെ സാധാരണയായി സമരം തുടങ്ങുന്നതിനു മുന്പ് പിരിച്ചുവിടാറാണ് പതിവ്.]

A few days after the movement started, activists sought to establish a dialogue with the leadership of the local political parties. These activists invited political leaders to attend a meeting in order to discuss any differences of opinion regarding what the local people thought was a significant threat to their existence as a community. A local activist, who was part of the leadership in the beginning, said that the mainstream political parties largely ignored the invitation:

> "We invited all the political parties to partake in the meeting. We also informed the panchayat officials. Nobody from the panchayat attended the meeting, and most of the political parties also kept away on that day. Only a district level leader of CPI attended the meeting. But that was also not a decision of the party to send him to the meeting. He attended it more on an individual basis as most politicos do when there is an emerging struggle."

[മീറ്റിങ്ങിലേക്ക് ഇവിട്ടുള്ള സകലമാന രാഷ്ട്രിയ പാറ്റികളെയും ക്ഷണിച്ചു. പഞ്ചായത്തിലെ ആള്ക്കാരെയും വിളിച്ചു. പഞ്ചായത്തില്നിന്ന് ആരും തന്നെയും വന്നില്ല. രാഷ്ട്രിയ പാറ്റികളില് മിക്കവരും ഒഴിഞ്ഞു നിന്നു. സിപിഐ യുടെ ഒരു ജില്ലാതല നേതാവ് മാത്രം പങ്കെടുത്തു. പക്ഷെ അദ്ദേഹം പങ്കെടുത്തത് പാറ്റിയുടെ തീരുമാനത്തിന്റെ അടിസ്ഥാനതിലായിരുന്നില്ല. ആയാള് ഒരു ലോകല് രാഷ്ട്രിയക്കാരന് എന്ന സ്വന്തം നിലയിലാണ് പങ്കെടുത്തത്.]

Another respondent said that the politicians regularly threatened the movement, thus hoping to browbeat them into submission. Many respondents believed that the plant officials, along with the local politicians, had lent support to the counter-movement in the name of the Employment Protection Committee that the employees of HCCB plant had briefly established. A leader of the employees of the plant, during one of the many incendiary speeches made in front of the struggle arena, is said to have threatened the local people with dire consequences if the employees lost their jobs as a result of the plant shutting down.[340] Interestingly, this leader also happened to be the member of a leftist party that has been taking a publicly strident stance against the negative social effects of corporate globalization. According to a local activist,

> This was the gist of what he said. If our struggle against Coca Cola affects their jobs, then they will thrash us. That was the message they all sought to send out. He said that he supported all the policy decisions that his party took as far as globalization and other issues are concerned. In a threatening vein he added, "But here the most important concern is employment. And we won't let scot free those that stand in the way of employment at a time when there is increasing unemployment in our country."

> [ഇതാണ് അങ്ങേര് പറഞ്ഞതിന്റെ രത്നച്ചുരുക്കം. സമരം അവരുടെ ജോലിയെ ബാധിച്ചാല് അവര് ഞങ്ങളെ വച്ചേക്കില്ല. അതായിരുന്ന അവരുടെ സന്ദേശം. അയാള് പറഞ്ഞു ആഗോളവല്ക്കരണത്തിനെയും മറ്റും സമ്ബന്ധിച്ച്, അവരുടെ പാറ്റിയുടെ നയത്തോട് പൂര്ണ്ണയോജിപ്പാണ്. എന്നിട്ട്, ഞങ്ങളെ വിരട്ടുന്ന സ്വരത്തില് പറഞ്ഞു: "പക്ഷെ ഇപ്പോള് ഞങ്ങളുടെ ഏറ്റവും പ്രധാനപ്പെട്ട പ്രശ്നം തൊഴിലാണ്. ഞങ്ങളുടെ തൊഴില് ഇല്ലാതാക്കാന് ശ്രമിക്കുന്ന ആരെയും വെറുതെ വിടത്തില്ല. പ്രത്യേകിച്ച് രാജ്യം മുഴവന് തൊഴിലില്ലയ്മ കൂടുന്ന അവസരത്തില്."]

Aside from such threats from the politicians was the actual violence unleashed by the state on the movement activist through the police, particularly early on. For example,

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[340] <u>Haritha Bhoomi.</u>

the state had deployed a large posse of policemen in front of the plant. Harassment of various sorts, ranging from arresting the male activists and assaulting the women, was a regular fare. On the 50th day of the movement, when the activists had invited several civil society members and organized a large meeting, the police officers charged at the attendees, and beat many of them without provocation.[341] Later on, they were arrested and charges were leveled against them. A civil society activist who attended the meeting and witnessed the police attack said: "They didn't beat us, but mainly the tribal people. It was a peaceful protest and there was no provocation". [അവര് മിക്കവാറും ആദിവാസി ആൾക്കാരെയാണ് അടിച്ചത്, ഞങ്ങളെ അടിച്ചില്ല. വളരെ ശാന്തമായ രീതിയിലുള്ള സമരമാണ് അവിടെ നടന്നതെന്നോർക്കണം.] This person implied that the police officers, well aware of the hierarchies in society, "knew" who to beat. This point was clarified by another respondent who maintained that although the police detained the civil society activists at the police station for a few hours, they were not physical attacked. According to this respondent, an attack on the civil society activists, many of whom are considered "respected citizens," would have led to public outcry and discredit the police force.

As mentioned above, with the emergence of the "counter-movement," the issue came to be defined as a question of the availability of water versus employment opportunities for a few people. This interpretation of the problem provided politicians with a chance to justify their opposition to the movement. Such an interpretation was also consistent with the prevalent popular discourse that linked Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) to the appropriation of natural resources and the generation of employment. But many in the movement pointed out the irony that despite such huge investments, and the

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[341] Ibid.

local people having to bear the social costs, the plant did not employ a large number of people.

The local institution of the state – the Panchayat – that was to have a big role in the movement later on, initially vehemently opposed this project. Because the Panchayat was the local body, the local politicians could exercise their immediate power. Like all other bodies of the political establishment, the Panchayat ignored initially the social problem in Plachimada. This omission was met with several protest marches to its offices, many of which were led by the women of Plachimada. The protestors argued that although the decision to allow HCCB to establish plant in Plachimada was made by the state government, the license to operate was provided by the Panchayat. There were several criticisms from within the movement, and by several others, that the Panchayat and other bodies of the state such as the Pollution Control Board of Kerala had not ensured that the strict environmental and other safety regulations set for establishing industries were observed in Plachimada. A few respondents said that the politicians of the ruling parties in the Panchayat turned around and supported the movement when the latter became more popular, and elections to the Panchayat were nearing. A civil society activist, who was critical of the role of the leadership in giving over the reigns of the movement to the political parties, remembered:

> A committee of the Legislative Assembly of Kerala came here to gather evidence regarding the water problem. I was one of those who presented evidence to the effect that there are health problems, and there are pollutants in the water… The then president of the Panchayat said that they didn't have any problems with the plant's functioning in Plachimada. Interestingly, it is the same politician that later turned against the plant, became a leading person in the movement, and won awards and such.
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> [കേരളനിയമസഭയുടെ ഒരു കമ്മിറ്റി ഇവിടെ വന്ന് വെള്ള പ്രശ്നത്തെപ്പറ്റി തെളിവെടുപ്പ് നടത്തി. തെളിവ് കൊടുത്ത ആൾക്കാരില് ഞാനുമുണ്ടായിരുന്നു.

ഞാന് പറഞ്ഞു വെള്ളത്തില് ധാരാളം പ്രശ്നങ്ങളുണ്ട്, ഇവിടത്തെ ജനങ്ങൾക്ക് ആരോഗ്യ പ്രശ്നങ്ങളുണ്ട്. ആ സമയത്തെ പഞ്ചായത് പ്രസിഡന്റ് പറഞ്ഞു അവര്ക്ക് ഇവിടെ കമ്പനി പ്രവര്ത്തിക്കുന്നതില് യാതൊരു പ്രശ്നവുമില്ലെന്ന്. ഇതേ രാഷ്ടിയക്കാരന് പിന്നീട് സമരത്തിന്റെ നേതാവാകുകയും ധാരാളം അവാര്ട്ടും മറ്റും വാങ്ങുകയും ചെയ്തു.]

On the other hand, the Member of Legislative Assembly (MLA) of Kerala who represented Chittoor (of which Plachimada is part) refused to address the problem in Plachimada for a year. After a year of the movement, the activists organized a protest march to the MLA's home, a few kilometers from Plachimada, and forced politicians to visit the struggle arena. "So, the next day he came and extended support to the movement. He never cared to come back after that though," reported a local activist. [അയാള് അടുത്തദിവസം വന്ന് സമരത്തെ പിന്തുണക്കുന്നു എന്ന് പ്രഖ്യാപിച്ചിട്ടുപോയി. എങ്കിലും അങ്ങേര് അതിനുശേഷം അങ്ങോട്ട് തിരിഞ്ഞുനോക്കിയിട്ടില്ല.]

More than two years after the movement started, when the elections to the local panchayat and the Indian parliament were round the corner, the parties on the left started increasingly to support the movement. Some of the prominent leaders of these parties had attended some of the spectacular meetings, such as the World Water conference organized in Plachimada.[342] An anecdote narrated by an activist regarding the commitment of the politicians to the cause of the movement was instructive. Specifically, there was a local leader who shed his initial inhibitions about the movement and contested the elections to Kerala's legislative assembly. Leading up to the elections, he had ensured that the movement endorsed his campaign. However, he lost the election. This activist spoke to the political leader the day after elections to find out what he

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[342] Plachimada Samaram Pathravaarthakaliloode: Samaharanam (The Plachimada Movement through Media Reports: A Compilation).

thought about the future course of the movement. This individual remembered that "he told me that he was no more interested in the movement and it was all your responsibility from now on. This has been the attitude of the politicians in general." [അയാള് എന്നോട്ടപറഞ്ഞു സമരമൊക്കെ നിങ്ങടെയാണ്, ഇനിമേല് എനിക്കതില് താല്പ്പര്യമൊന്നുമില്ല. ഇതായിരുന്നു മിക്ക രാഷ്ട്രീയക്കാരുടെയും സമീപനം.]

The social class background of most of the powerful politicians in Plachimada is instrumental to understanding their attitude of indifference or opposition to the movement of the tribal people, who are seen as the "lowest" rung of the society. As in most rural parts of post-colonial India, the leadership in these areas – in political, economic, and social aspects – has emerged largely from the land owning classes who often belong to the upper castes or in some instances the middle castes. When individuals from the lower strata of society – in terms of caste, class, and gender – emerge in leadership roles, there are often several inducements offered for their co-optation into the mainstream. Consequently, most of the local politicians, being part of privileged social classes, were largely reticent about the Plachimada movement. Those who were critical of the role of politicians in the movement, believed that when they did support the movement their interests were being served by doing so. According to an activist,

> The politicians and parties were against the movement and when they supported it later on, they did so in a limited and inhibited way. Crucially they themselves refused to be part of social criticism and transformation by partaking in the struggle with a democratic spirit. Sensing the popular mood, they had to support, although in an inhibited way, the movement as it attained international attention. They possibly used it all for their electoral gains too. Other than that, the truth is that both the ruling and opposition coalition of political parties in Kerala have been reticent towards everything with a democratic spirit – including meaningful decentralization of power and empowering local governing bodies so that communities can have a level of self-determination with regard to the mode of existence – including the kind of development – they want.

[രാഷ്ട്രീയക്കാരും പാറ്റ്ടികളും ആദ്യമേ സമരത്തിനെതിരായിരുന്നു. പിന്നീട് അവര് പിന്തുണച്ചപ്പോള് വളരെ ചുരുങ്ങിയ രീതിയിലായിരുന്നു. തീറ്ച്ചയായും, അവര് സാമൂഹികവ്യവസ്ഥിതിയെ കാര്യമായി അവലോകനം ചെയ്ത് ശരിയായ ജനാധിപത്യ രീതിയിലേക്ക് മാറ്റങ്ങള് വരുത്തുന്നതില്നിന്ന് പിന് വലിഞ്ഞു. സമരം ജനകീയ പിന്തുണ നേടി കഴിഞ്ഞപ്പോള്, പ്രത്യേകിച്ച് അന്താരാഷ്ട്രീയ തലത്തില് ശ്രദ്ധയാകറ്ഷിച്ചതിനുശേഷം അവര് ആകെ ചെയ്തത് സമരത്തെ ചുരുങ്ങിയ രീതിയില് പിന്തുണച്ചു. ഒരു പക്ഷെ വരുന്ന തിരഞ്ഞെടുപ്പ് മുന്പില് കണ്ടുകൊണ്ടാകാം അവര് ഇതെല്ലാം ചെയ്തത്. ഇതല്ലാതെ, യാഥാറ്ഥ്യമെന്തെന്നാല് കേരളത്തിലെ രണ്ട കക്ഷികളും -- ഭരണത്തിലുള്ളവരും, എതിറ്പക്ഷവും -- ശരിയായ ജനാധിപത്യത്തിന്റെ സത്ത ഉള്ക്കൊള്ളുന്ന എന്തിനോട്ടും എതിറ്പ്പാണ പ്രകടിപ്പിക്കാറ്. ഉദാഹരണത്തിന് ഇവിടെ കേരളത്തില് അധികാരവികേന്ദ്രീകരണവും തദ്ദേശസ്വയമ്ഭരണസ്ഥാപനങ്ങളെ ശക്തിപ്പെടുത്തുക, അതിന്റെ അടിസ്ഥാനത്തില് തദ്ദേശവാസികള്ക്ക് എങ്ങിനെ ജീവിക്കണമ്, എന്ത് രീതിയിലുള്ള വികസനം വേണം, ഇങ്ങനെയുള്ള കാര്യങ്ങള് തീരുമാനിക്കാനുള്ള സ്വയമ്ഭരണാവകാശം ഉണ്ടാവുക. ഈ രീതിയിലുള്ള ജനാധിപത്യസമ്സ്കാരത്തോട് രണ്ട് കക്ഷികള്ക്കും എതിറ്പ്പാണ്.]

Despite these experiences that revealed the social affiliations of the mainstream political leaders, the movement, particularly after the emergence of civil society activists into leadership roles, not only sought to win the politicians over to their side, but also depended on them to defend this protest. Many of the civil society activists in leadership positions in the movement understood their roles only with reference to the political parties, often in a submissive way. For example, an individual who has been part of many civil society initiatives in Kerala acknowledged:

> My role was based on my relation with left politics. I have actually used my relationship with the left parties to get them address the problem in Plachimada. I did it this way: I continuously persuaded them, "if you are serious about anti-globalization struggles, then this is one of your opportunities."

[ഈ സമരത്തില് എന്റെ റോള് ഞാന് സ്വയം മനസ്സിലാക്കിയത്, ലെഫ്റ്റ് പൊളിറ്റിക്സുമായി എനിക്കുള്ള ബന്ധത്തിന്റെ അടിസ്ഥാനത്തിലാണ്. എനിക്ക് ലെഫ്റ്റ് പാറ്റ്ടീസുമായുള്ള ബന്ധമുപയോഗിച്ച് ഞാന് അവരെ പ്ളാച്ചിമടയിലെ പ്രശ്നത്തെ അഭിമുഖീകരിക്കാന് പ്രേരിപ്പിച്ചു. ഇങ്ങനെയാണ് ഞാന് അത് ചെയ്തത്.

ഞാന് സ്ഥിരമായി അവരോട് പറഞ്ഞു "ഇഫ് യു ആര് സീരിയസ് എബൌട്
ആന്റി-ഗ്ളോബലൈസേഷന് സ്ട്രഗ്ള്സ്, ദിസ് ഇസ് വണ് ഒഫ് യുവര്
ഓപ്പറ്റുണിറ്റിസ്."]

As he said this, the respondent acknowledged the fact that the initiative to invite HCCB to establish a plant was made by a Left government in Kerala. The same respondent, having spoken about the problematic nature of development in India, remarked about the views of the mainstream leftist parties: "Such forms of development are problematic. This, in fact, the left is not willing to acknowledge. My effort has been to communicate this with the left – for so many years now." [ഈ രീതിയില്ലുള്ള വികസനം ധാരാളം പ്രശ്നങ്ങളുണ്ടാക്കം. ഈ വസ്തുത ലെഫ്റ്റ് അംഗീകരിക്കാന് മടിക്കുന്നു. വര്ഷങ്ങളായുള്ള എന്റെ പ്രയത്നം ഈ വസ്തുത ലെഫ്റ്റിനെക്കൊണ്ടംഗീകരിപ്പിക്കുക എന്നതാണ്.] Referring to the rhetoric of the Left regarding imperialism, this person added: "If you don't understand capitalism, you can never understand imperialism." [നമ്മള് മുതലാളിത്തം മനസ്സിലാക്കിയില്ലെങ്കില് സാമ്രാജ്യത്തം ഒരിക്കലും മനസ്സിലാക്കാന് പറ്റില്ല.]

On its part, the post-liberalization Indian state, in whose framework the politicians operate, has become aligned with the demands of the market. In Kerala, where industrialization has been thought to be "affected by militant trade unionism," the ruling parties – be it of the Left or Right – have concurred on the need to improve the "investment climate." The functioning of the Coke plant in Plachimada, given that it was an investment venture by one of the "strongest brands" in the world, had to be protected. The rationale was that only if such "disruptive influences" on the market could be curbed, would the country attract increased investment and sustained economic growth. In this regard, a respondent observed:

"As far as the state and its institutions are concerned, they all have a common viewpoint as far as development, communities are concerned. They see it at best as an environmental issue or an issue of the misery of poor people. They don't see it as a political issue of marginalized people. Even if they do understand it, they don't have this politics. Instead, they support the politics of the establishment."

[ഗവണ്ണമെന്റും അതിന്റെ ഏജൻസീസിനെയും സമ്ബന്ധിച്ച് നോക്കിയാല് ഒരു കാര്യം കാണാം. അവറ്ക്കെല്ലാം വികസനത്തെയും തദ്ദേശവാസികളുറ്റെ പ്രശ്ണങ്ങളേയും സമ്ബന്ധിച്ച് ഒരേ വീക്ഷണമാണുള്ളത്. അവര് ഒന്നെങ്കില് ഇതിനെ ഒരു പരിസ്ഥിതി പ്രശ്ണമായി കാണും. അല്ലെങ്കില് പാവപ്പെട്ട ജനങ്ങളുടെ പ്രശ്ണമായി കാണും. അവര് ഇതിനെ പ്രാന്തവല്ലുരിക്കപ്പെട്ട ജനങ്ങളുടെ രാഷ്ട്രിയ പ്രശ്ണമായി കാണില്ല. അവര് ഇതിനെ അങ്ങിനെ മനസ്സിലാക്കിയാല് കൂടി, ഈ രാഷ്ട്രീയ നിലപാടില്ല. അതിനുപകരം, അവര് എസ്റ്റാബ്ളിഷ്മെന്റിന്റെ രാഷ്ടിയത്തെ പിന്ണക്കുന്നു.]

During the course of the movement, various agencies of the state were commissioned to undertake studies on the water problem in Plachimada.[343] While they focused on the depletion of ground water, they did not address the question of ground water pollution caused by hazardous waste. BBC Radio 4 had analyzed samples of the sludge and found dangerous levels of hazardous waste.[344] A respondent pointed out the reluctance of the state to undertake studies to address the question of ground water pollution by hazardous waste. According to this person, such laxity weakened the case of the Plachimada people against the HCCB plant in the courts. The activist, who was critical of civil society leadership ceding the leadership of the movement to the state and political establishment, pointed out the complicity of the agents of the state in not analyzing samples of the sludge:

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[343] Among the reports brought out by the state on the Plachimada problem were those by the Groundwater Department of Kerala, which came out in January 2003; additionally, the Central Groundwater Board of India brought out a report in September 2003 etc. All these are compiled in Plachimada Pathanasamithi, "Plachimada Coca Cola Jalamalineekarana Prasnam: Samahaaram" (November 2005).

[344] http://www.bbc.co.uk/radio4/youandyours/yy_20040102.shtml

If you ask me why, I think the reason is that if the state undertakes such a study about hazardous waste and pollution in Plachimada, then it will adversely affect the industrial development in all the other areas in Kerala. In such a case, that will set standards for all other industries to follow later. The business lobby in the state won't be interested in this. This is a refusal to regulate. Because the industrial lobby is not interested, the state itself is not. Because the state is not interested, other levels of the state such as Panchayat etc. don't have the interest.

[എന്നോട് എന്താണിങ്ങനെയുള്ള പഠങ്ങള് നടത്തതിരുന്നെന്നു ചോദിച്ചാല്, ഞാന് വിചാരിക്കുന്നത്, ഗവണ്മെന്റ് അങ്ങിനെയൊര പഠനം നടത്തിയാല്, ഇവിടെ പൊലൃൂഷന് ഉണ്ട് അന്ന് കണ്ടെത്തിയാല്, ആക്ഷനെ എടുക്കേണ്ടിവരുമ്. അങ്ങിനെ വന്നാല്, കേരളത്തിലെ ഇൻഡസ്ട്രിയല് ഡെവലപ്മെന്റിനെ സാരമായി ബാധിക്കും. അങ്ങിനെ വരുമ്ബോല്, ഇവിടെ ബാക്കിയുള്ള വ്യവസായങ്ങൾക്ക് കറ്ശനമായ സ്റ്റാൻഡാര്ഡ്സ് കൊണ്ടുവരേണ്ടിവരും. ബാക്കി എല്ലാ ഇൻഡസ്ട്രീസും അത് ഫോളൊ ചെയ്യണ്ടി വരുമ്. ഇവിട്ടത്തെ ബിസിനെസ്സ് ലോബിക്ക് അതില് താല്പര്യമില്ല. ഇത് റെഗലേറ്റ് ചെയ്യനുള്ള വിസമ്മതമാണ്. ബിസിനെസ്സ് ലോബിക്ക് താല്പര്യമില്ലത്തതിനാല് ഗവണ്മെന്റിനും താല്പര്യമില്ല. ഗവണ്മെന്റിന് താല്പര്യമില്ലാത്തതിനാല് പഞ്ചായത്തിനും താല്പര്യമില്ല.]

The opinion of many respondents reflected the prevailing public opinion in Plachimada that the agents of the state, including the "expert committees" constituted by the state to examine the extent of the water problem in Plachimada, could not be trusted.

In the context of neoliberal globalization, many states have undergone a clear transformation: they do not identify themselves as constituted by "sovereign" people, as per traditional liberal democratic principles, whose sovereignty they are duty-bound to protect. Therefore, the state becomes a mechanism that serves the interests of the dominant classes and is infused with the logic of the market. The above discussion of the actions of political parties and individual politicians, along with the institutions and agents of the state, amply demonstrates that the politicians do not represent the people and their interests. In such a scenario, which in part can be understood as crisis of representation, communities are faced with a crucial question: What should they do to

address their concerns? The argument regarding the inevitability of returning to the structures of power – the state, political society, etc. – to redress social problems is problematic. However, in the absence of explaining ways to address the social problem in Plachimada creatively through dialogue with people that encouraged their participation, the leadership of the movement had to knock on the doors of the state and politicians to represent their cause. Such a move proved to be detrimental to the movement.

Summary of Findings: The Politics of Civil Society

The purpose of this analysis is to understand the politics of civil society and to find out whether the civil society agents in Plachimada were able to provide leadership to the social movement that is consistent with its stated aim in recent literature to counter hegemonic social relations. This analysis assumed that politics pervades the society, although in a liberal democratic polity there is a decoupling of the political sphere and the state from society, whereby the former is presented as the exclusive realm of politics. Instead, in this analysis, the society is seen as necessarily political, and the sphere of "established politics" and the state draw their power from the structures of social relations, within which the interests of powerful social forces are dominant. However, the working of power in such social formations is never complete and is always open to challenges from the dominated sectors of society.

Social movements that address questions of social inequality, and the problems linked to those issues, are understood to be constituted by the dominated sections of society. Thus, social movements as collective action that seek social change are necessarily political, although they may not partake in the "mainstream and established

politics." Within this theoretical framework is where the politics of civil society should be analyzed. Underlying the actions of the civil society leaders, as part of Plachimada movement, was their political approach based on their world-view regarding social processes, or their ideology. Did they understand their intervention in the social movement as political? What kind of social change did they seek?

To begin with, most of the respondents, including the civil society activists who were in the leadership positions, and whose actions diverged significantly from the interests of the activists in the movement, in principle emphasized that the struggle in Plachimada represented the communities of oppressed people. Such politics, according to them, responded to the "mainstream" notions of development that imposed policy decisions on impoverished and marginalized people. Accordingly, they opposed the ideology of "growth" that led to "mindless industrialization." The civil society leaders in the movement, while responding to questions regarding the nature of politics, emphasized Plachimada as a "symbol" of "people's politics." [ജനാധികാര രാഷ്ട്രിയത്തിന്റെ പ്രതീകം.] One such leader asserted that the movement started from "their life experiences as a community." [സമരം അവരുടെ സമുദായത്തിന്റെ അനുഭവങ്ങളില്നിന്നാണ് തുടങ്ങിയത്.] According to another, the politics of Plachimada was based on the limits of natural resources – the idea that natural resources are exhaustible. According to this critic, these resources should be made available for use by the community: "Plachimada was a fight to protect the habitat and its resources from the onslaught of capitalists." [മുതലാളിത്തത്തില്നിന്ന് ജനങ്ങളുടെ ജീവിതരീതിയെയും ജീവിക്കുന്ന ഇടത്തെയും രക്ഷിക്കാനുള്ള സമരമാണിത്.] Accordingly, many respondents spoke about "imperialism,"

"exploitation of natural resources," etc., as the primary issues that the Plachimada movement was fighting against.

Yet, what were the limits of the politics of civil society, as revealed in the case of Plachimada movement? The first section of the analysis, which was concerned with the definition of the problem, illustrated the disjunction between the definitions of the social problem by the local activists who had initiated the movement and the civil society activists who emerged later on into leadership positions. The crucial difference was that at least a section of the local activists, with their experience of mobilizing tribal people, were acutely aware of the way in which the hegemonic system worked – through both direct violence and indirectly by the perpetuation of the *status quo*. In material terms, the content of the hegemonic system was characterized by social inequalities that are produced and reproduced locally. Consequently, they realized that their struggle against existing inequalities in the local society, including those of caste, class, and gender, was not separate from the global struggle against the appropriation of resources by big corporations. In fact, because the interests of these corporations converge at the local level with those of the dominant sectors, the "global" struggle had to be conducted in the form of local mobilizations against existing forms of social power legitimated through social relations. In a nutshell, the politics of civil society activists was debilitated in the absence of such social criticism, and thus became limited to merely "problem-solving" in a narrow sense.

The second and third sections analyzed – with regard to the processes within the movement – how the limitations of civil society politics, in the absence of critical reflection and self-criticism, imposed limits on the scope of movement activism. In the

absence of conscious efforts at building dialogic interaction among the movement activists, decision-making powers had a highly centralized character – i.e., a few leaders of the solidarity and the struggle committees were privy to decisions regarding the direction of the movement. In the absence of any effort to establish conversations with the local communities and building solidarity, ground-level mobilization suffered. The focus of the movement, in terms of everyday activities, shifted to the civil society organizations that became the main providers of resources – both material and important cultural resources such as access to the media, important social networks, politicians, and institutions of the state. This dependence reproduced the already existing social hierarchies within the movement. Without participatory action the morale of the activists suffered, thus resulting in their alienation from the movement.

In the fourth section, the interaction between the state and the movement was analyzed. The approach of the state and the "political establishment" was markedly different in the initial phase, when tribal people were mobilized by the local activists as part of the fledgling Plachimada movement, as opposed to the latter when the civil society activists gained leadership. In the second phase, the problems that the movement addressed were solved by courting the state and its agencies, or by winning over a section of the politicians to represent the struggle in the Courts. With increased media attention, the movement acquired increased public legitimacy. On the other hand, the way the media framed the movement became a powerful influence, often limiting, the way in which the protest was conducted. In the end, the civil society leadership proved to be merely a conduit for transferring the decision making-powers of the movement to the politicians, particularly the various agencies of the state. This shift was made at the cost

of mobilizing at the local level through dialogue that encouraged participation of local people in collective action. The purpose of the movement was thus narrowly defined as closing down the plant.

The analysis demonstrated the limitations of the politics of civil society, particularly in the context of the global spread of neoliberalism, whereby interests of big corporations are advanced through alignment with the interests of locally powerful sections of society. And as illustrated by the attempts of the civil society leaders to "fix" the narrowly defined problem, their approach to the movement did not include or encourage a critical understanding of how the "particular problem" came into being or identify the social forces that generated this issue. In the absence of such critical analysis, the civil society operated on the basis of the prevalent ontology of society, whereby the primacy of the state and its agents – the politicians – remain unquestioned. Nor were the social bases of their power explored. Social hierarchies were not merely taken as given, but due to the lack of critique were reproduced within the movement, thereby producing dependence and alienating activists. Given the paucity of such analysis, the exploration of alternatives was never the concern of civil society. The politics of civil society was thus limited to mitigating action, rather than social transformation based on exposing how the concentration of power is reproduced.

CHAPTER 7

**Discussion of Findings and Conclusion:
Towards Rethinking Civil Society**

The primary aim of this study is to understand the politics of civil society that informed the Plachimada movement. Antonio Gramsci[345] pointed out that intellectual and organizational leadership provided within the civil society, unless a conscious effort is made at democratic political action, tends to reproduce and perpetuate the *status quo* of power relations. In this regard, the aim of this study is to understand, as part of Plachimada movement, whether civil society was able to democratize social relations.

As mentioned in earlier chapters, the marginalized tribal people, who live in rural India, are often subjected to oppression within the existing feudal systems and as part of the developmentalism practiced by the post-colonial Indian state. In the current situation, such processes have been accentuated by the neoliberal pursuit of accelerated accumulation through appropriation of resources (often referred to as primitive accumulation), often at the cost of endangering the very existence of these precarious communities. Several commentators have pointed out that the state and the social structures of domination aid the process of "accumulation by dispossession" in the context of neoliberalism. Specifically, the Plachimada movement was to have been one that sought alternatives to the current situation, which is characterized by "inequalities multiply[ing] rather than diminish[ing]."[346] From the analysis presented in the previous chapter, the local people in Plachimada were seeking alternatives to existing structures of

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[345] Gramsci, Prison Notebooks

[346] David Harvey, Spaces of Capital: Towards a Critical Geography, (New York: Routledge, 2001), p.191.

social and ideological domination, including oppressive feudal relations and the developmentalism informed by neoliberalism. Thus, clearly, they were not seeking to remain a "particularistic" movement that merely sought to shut down the HCCB plant.[347]

Against this background, the analysis in the previous chapter showed that the politics and actions of civil society activists, who emerged in leadership positions in the movement, were detrimental to the development of a protracted struggle aimed at challenging the *status quo* and seeking alternatives – in effect, recasting the community relations in Plachimada. In this chapter, the findings of this analysis, particularly related to the politics of civil society, will be explained against a broader theoretical terrain.

Given these findings, civil society did not live up to the promises found in the previous literature that was examined in an earlier chapter. Civil society, in undertaking its "pedagogic function" of conducting the struggle of tribal and lower caste people on their behalf, effectively reproduced the hegemonic content of social relations prevalent in Indian societies. The assumption was that the "masses," unschooled in the ways of the establishment, needed a helping hand that could only be provided by a benign civil society.[348] The general idea in the traditional organizational literature is that organizations, and thus social movements, tend to become gradually undemocratic. This theme became quite popular and almost a *fait accompli*, subsequent to the work of Michels. What this study illustrates, however, is that such an outcome is not natural, almost evolutionary. Rather, bureaucracy and hierarchy are the result of specific

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[347] While closing down the plant became the stated aim of the movement towards the latter phase, many respondents emphasized the need to place this specific demand in the context of the ongoing oppression and marginalization of tribal and lower caste communities in Plachimada and nearby areas. Many local activists and leaders saw the protest against Coca Cola as the continuation of the larger struggle against an oppressive and hegemonic system.

[348] Michels, Political Parties.

decisions and aims that gives an organization a specific characteristic. There is nothing natural or inevitable about such an outcome. The analysis found that unreflexive actions on the part of civil society leadership in the Plachimada movement were detrimental for the advancement of participatory collective action, which is crucial to the advancement of counter-hegemonic collective action. In other words, instead of empowering local people through collective action, civil society in Plachimada produced dependence that is crucial to the perpetuation of hegemony.

This chapter will seek to understand why the civil society could not provide a counter hegemonic critique that, in turn, could inform collective action in Plachimada. Such an analysis will require locating civil society within the mainstream, often realist, literature where this sphere is an intermediary between the state and market. Therefore, the ontological dissimilarity between state and civil society that is premised on the assumptions of realism, a centered view of society, essentialism, reification and fatalism, will be examined.

Such issues trap civil society in a "one dimensional" reality wherein real change is impossible. In other words, civil society, in its current forms, can be understood easily as vehicle that perpetuates hegemony rather than social change. This position prevents civil society activists from initiating mass mobilization through building solidarities. Contributing to the inability of civil society to launch progressive change is a particularistic political vision: in contemporary civil society political action often amounts to fixing particular problem rather than challenging power relations through the mass mobilization of people. This chapter will conclude with an attempt at rethinking

civil society on the lines of theoretical advancements that contribute to a radical democratic critique of hegemony.

Civil Society, Politics and Social Movements

The spread of neoliberalism and its many ill effects on societies all over the world has led many to think of ways to counter "globalization from above." The movements often referred to as "globalization from below,"[349] for example, are expected to provide the counterweight required to challenge neoliberal impositions. Significantly, civil society or "global civil society" (GCS) has been promoted as the sphere of counter-globalization movements. By extension, various sorts of voluntary associations (including non-governmental organizations) are believed to provide leadership for social transformation and a democratic future. In the writings of many intellectuals and activists, civil society is now thought to foster a democratized society, without specifying the nature of democracy or power that pervades social relations. On the other hand, NSM theorists have proposed the expansion of civil society, as opposed to the incursions of the state into everyday lives of people, as one of the key aims of new social movements. Clearly, in contemporary times, civil society and social movements are intertwined both theoretically and in practical terms, although there is no necessary connection between the two.

The purpose of this study is to analyze whether civil society, in its current form, leads to social transformation and a search for alternatives. In traditional liberal thought, civil society is understood in structural terms, as a sphere of social existence that is

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[349] Jeremy Brecher, Tim Costello, Brendan Smith, Globalization from Below: The Power of Solidarity, (Cambridge, MA: Southend Press, 2000).

beholden to an external universal – i.e. the state. On the other hand, such a sphere is also thought to be characterized by autonomy and an antidote to the state, or the power center. An implication is that the state is the realm of politics, while civil society is the realm of civility and "apolitical." By extension, several commentators have, more recently, emphasized the importance of "social capital" in helping marginalized persons or groups to have access to political processes. Again, civil society is thought to be the realm where such social capital is gained.

Accordingly, those who have been considered the "representatives" of the "modern" civil society – voluntary associations of various sorts such as non governmental organizations, environmental associations, youth groups, developmentalists, religious groups, and social clubs, – have adopted the task of helping people to gain social capital, thus alleviating the effects of inequality such as poverty. Underlying these sorts of actions – often deemed political – is the belief that social problems are not simply the result of how power is accumulated and exercised by dominant classes in society. Instead, the experiences of communities in this regard are taken as ontologically given.

The upshot is a severely limited view of politics and social change. Several commentators have pointed out how politics has declined within the neoliberal context.[350] In place of the view that politics represents conflict and contention among social forces, this endeavor is restricted increasingly to the state and the political establishment. Specifically noteworthy is that the state and civil society are assumed to be distinctly

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[350] Peter Marden, The Decline of Politics: Governance, Globalization and the Public Sphere, (Burlington, Vermont: Ashgate Publishing Limited, 2003).

different from one another, and thus people are increasingly alienated from decisions that have impact on their everyday existence.

In many countries, such as India under the influence of neoliberalism, the same policies of economic liberalization and privatization of natural resources and public industries are practiced by politicians irrespective of their official affiliations. This strategy suggests that the powerful classes aligned with market – both locally and globally – working with the state. As a result, many societies are witnessing a depoliticization of governance, with the latter following certain patterns that average persons are not permitted to control. In practical terms, policy decisions aimed at "development" and "growth" – in effect increasing inequalities, marginalization, and oppression – are foisted on people.

In this context, the assumed differentiation between the state and civil society, which is at the core of liberal tradition, is to be questioned. Elevating such distinctions to the status of an ontological *a priori* may be counterproductive for the meaningful democratization of societies. In reality, these so called distinct domains are made possible through the interaction of people that consolidates social relations, however temporary and contingent they may be. Therefore, there is a need to be wary of reification of civil society.

Civil Society, State and Market

An essay, titled "Civil Society and Democratic Politics" by John Ehrenberg is instructive in advancing important ideas about the democratization of not just civil society but the state and economy (market).[351] In fact, Ehrenberg points out that the current theories of civil society are heavily influenced by Tocqueville's portrayal of American democracy as characterized by civic volunteerism.[352] Tocqueville, while on his trip to America a century and half ago, emphasized the "local" nature of voluntary associations as critical to advancing civic virtues that he thought fostered American democracy. Aside from the virtues accompanying civility, such as respect and tolerance, the "mediating institutions" of civil society are thought to be crucial in promomting participation in public affairs.[353]

More recently, according to Robert Putnam, the declining membership in traditional "civic" organizations has decreased social capital in the US.[354] This problem, it is believed, has had impact on public participation and, by extension, the nature of democracy in the US. Interestingly, Putnam attributes this decreasing civic engagement and volunteerism to the increased presence of technology in everyday lives of people. Putnam, in discussing how technology aids individualization, did not look at how market forces structure society and generate social inequalities.

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[351] Ehrenberg, Civil Society

[352] Alexis de Tocqueville, Democracy in America, (New York: A.A. Knopf, 1966).

[353] According to Berger and Neuhaus, however, contemporary mediating institutions are indicative of conservatism. See Peter L. Berger, Richard John Neuhaus. 1977. To Empower People: The Role of Mediating Structures in Public Policy. Washington D.C.: American Enterprise Institute.

[354] Robert Putnam, Bowling Alone: The Collapse and Revival of American Community, (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2000).

Following on these ideas, the neo-Tocquevillianism that has informed conservative and neoliberal thinking proposes less government and more of local associationism. While checking the unquestioned power of states is important, uncritical emphasis on local associationism also presents problems. At the core of such associations, as the new makers of democracy discount, are politics and power differentials, based on social inequalities that perpetuate disparities.

The important theoretical direction, then, is to understand not just the form of civil society, but its content – specifically, the way power operates within "social relations and structures" and produces forms of social inequalities that permeate the state and the market. Underlying such a question is the view that the content of social life is not limited by the imagined discreteness of regions, but that these fluid spheres are penetrated by continuities of lived experience.

This point essentially means that it may be counterproductive to ignore the possibility that what happens in "civil society" is crucially influenced, at least to some measure, by the state and the market. Thus, Ehrenberg:

> "What civil society "is" can be grasped only by looking carefully at what its constituent structures do, how they are organized, and what political and economic forces are at work – no matter how strenuously some theorists try to describe it as an autonomous sphere of democratic activity."[355]

The argument here is that civil society should not be "described in and of itself,"[356] but can help to unravel important matters about the operation of social relations and structures, particularly their economic and political determinations.

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[355] Ehrenberg, Civil Society.

[356] Ibid.

In Plachimada the political institutions, including the state and political parties (which work within the operational logic of the state), had crucial influence on civil society, including how social movements are conducted. In the analysis chapter, the various influences of the state and political institutions were identified. Some of them took the form of direct coercion by the organs of the state such as the police, political parties, and bureaucrats and "experts" employed by the state to ascertain the nature of the "water problem," thus the movement was forced to seek "conflict resolution" through the Courts, whereby the government claimed to represent the struggling people of Plachimada.

Aside from such direct involvement of the state in the movement, the problem in Plachimada emerged out of state actions inspired by developmentalism. As pointed out earlier, the state's decision to allow big corporations to appropriate natural resources has taken a particular turn – referred to as neoliberalism – under the influence of the strengthened capitalist market.

Therefore, Ehrenberg points out that political institutions "have had a long history of recognizing and influencing *every* civil society's voluntary associations, interest groups and social movements."[357] According to him, the recent theories that trumpet the autonomy of civil society – particularly drawn from the East European experience – within the liberal democratic framework are misguided. Inspired by the theorizing in East Europe that lead to the collapse of the Communist bloc, many commentators have sought to portray civil society as a refuge for those who want to move away from the prospects imposed by the state. Hence, some of the NSM theorists have sought to portray civil

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[357] Ibid., p.238

society as where people can construct their own view of themselves and social order.[358]

Such theories, influenced by the writings of Habermas, often seek civil society as an end

in itself, and thus leave unanalyzed the role of social relations in structuring of this

relation. As Ehrenberg says,

> "The character of the legal system, national tax policy, administrative procedures, interference with membership practices that discriminate against women or racial minorities – all this, and a good deal more, has a palpable impact on the habits, norms, and organizations that stand between political institutions and the logic of the market. And state involvement in civil society goes considerably further than a series of interactions with an already-existing intermediate sphere. States often use civil society to further their own interests…"[359]

As is developed in an earlier chapter, the argument is that capitalist development in the

Third World has worked through the existing structures of hierarchy and domination,

thus strengthening and infusing them with the logic of the market. An analysis of history

provides ample evidence that states have been conduits in the production and

strengthening of domination, thereby making civil society in "modern societies"

redundant. Under the influence of neoliberalism, such forms of domination have, if

anything, strengthened. Along these lines, commentators such as James Petras have

argued in the context of Latin America that, contrary to the belief that civil society can be

the sphere of liberation from such forms of domination, in its current form, this domain

often legitimizes existing power relations.[360] Petras, among several others, has also

pointed out that unlike the popular belief in the context of globalization the state

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[358] Jean L. Cohen, Andrew Arato. <u>Civil Society and Political Theory,</u> (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 1992).

[359] Ehrenberg, <u>Civil Society</u>, p.238

[360] James Petras, Henry Veltmeyer. <u>Social Movements and State Power.</u>

continues to play a central role in society, although increasingly in favor of the dominant classes as opposed to the impoverished sectors.[361]

In the case of post-colonial India, development provided the possibility of advancing the hegemony of the dominant classes. The discourse of development that promised a better standard of living legitimized this process. Yet, in practice, development was not defined in ways that encouraged popular participation and reduced dependency on the state or other institutions.

In reality, the development practices employed in India have been imposed from above. The belief that big dams and big factories are the "temples of modern India"[362] resulted in the mass displacement of people, often to the squalor of urban slums. In effect, the hegemony of developmentalism has spawned a capitalist class that has thrived historically on feudal social relations and patronage by the state. This outcome has come at an enormous burden to ordinary people, whose lives have been sacrificed to the larger cause of development, with the promise that its fruits would reach them or their progeny some day.

The structure of existing power relations in society makes those at the "bottom end" "dispensable" for the 'greater common good'. Increasingly, such patterns of employing unscrutinized universals, such as "development," to reduce production costs are increasingly visible in the context of neoliberalism all over the world. Therefore, a crucial task for civil society actors is to unravel the content of these universals. The

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[361] James Petras, The New Development Politics: The Age of Empire Building and New Social Movements, (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2003).

[362] The first Prime Minister of independent India, Jawaharlal Nehru, referred to the big dams as the 'temples of modern India'. Specifically, this reference was made on October 22, 1963 while dedicating to the nation a newly built dam called Bhakra on River Sutlej.

traditional practices of "development," as modernization in Third World countries, often are imposed as necessary universals. As mentioned earlier, development is thought to be best left to the technocrats who are apolitical. Yet, often, development is based on the availability of resources (often external), such as investment funds, rather than specific needs of people.

The liberalization policies enacted by the State in early 1990s have, in effect, provided continuity to the development practices in India, with the exception that in neoliberalism market forces (such as big corporations) have replaced the state as the prime investor in development. More clearly, the state-market nexus is at the core of the hegemonic formation that is embedded in social relations. As mentioned earlier, with the emergence of Plachimada movement, the State feared that with opposition to Coca Cola, the "investment climate" in Kerala may be negatively affected. The assumption here is that with greater investment and higher growth rate, the lives of people will improve. Yet, the 'recipients' of the fruits of development have typically played no role in identifying the development trajectory they want. Clearly, the particular problem in Plachimada resulted from the developmental priorities set by the Indian state on the one hand and the pursuit of accumulation by big corporations on the other. Yet, this strategy was legitimated by the discourse of developmentalism, from which the dominant social classes stood to gain.

The important point at this juncture is that while civil society can be reconceptualized as a sphere of meaningful freedom and liberty, ignoring how power functions in contemporary civil society, particularly the state and the market is counterproductive. On the other hand, the very fact that civil society presents such

emancipatory potential is clear in the many social and mass movements, all over the world, that have made state power accountable to people. Such potential is the basis of collective action oriented toward democratic social change. However, the crucial question is: what kind of political vision can make such fundamental transformations possible?

Civil Society and Localism

Another crucial premise of Tocqueville is his faith in localism – the belief that local organizations serve the purpose of democracy rather than large scale organization. Earlier, the Indian state had promulgated policy decisions to further local governance. While the law-making required to strengthen local governing bodies have already taken place, this process called "decentralization" has not had much practical impact. Consistent with this belief, there was a campaign in Plachimada, as part of the movement, to strengthen the local structure of governance – the Panchayat – by using the decentralization promoted by the Indian state. While local governance may have the potential to promote people's participation in public affairs, and limit the arbitrariness inherent to the larger state, there is no necessary connection between localism and increased democracy.

In fact, existing research has borne out an argument to the contrary. Grant McConnell, in *Private Power and American Democracy*, argues that more often than not the main "function" of local organizations is to provide stability and maintain social order, rather than advance democratic participation among people.[363] Thus, McConnell

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[363] Grant McConnell, <u>Private Power and American Democracy</u>, (New York: Knopf, 1966).

questions a basic assumption of pluralism that informs contemporary theories of civil society:

> "Far from providing guarantees of liberty, equality, and concern for the public interest, organization of political life by small constituencies tend to enforce conformity, to discriminate in favor of elites, and to eliminate public values from effective political consideration."[364]

However, in the absence of examining critically local organizations, they may reproduce the prevailing hierarchies in society, often in the name of unity and coherence, to the detriment of democracy.

Ehrenberg explains McConnell's point further:

> "Guarantees of individual rights, the presence of internal opposition, and formal limits on the power of leaders might strengthen internal democracy, but they must often yield to the requirement of organizational coherence and effectiveness."[365]

Further, in societies with ossified hierarchies, large sections of people who are marginalized on the basis of class, race, caste, ethnicity, gender, or national origin may be removed systematically from democratic processes. The practices of exclusion, based on race in the Jim Crow era in the United States, clearly support such an argument. Similar forms of exclusion continue to be practiced all over the world.[366]

In a similar vein, Richard Sennett has argued that small and intimate settings, or local organizations, are often conducive to the organization of compulsion.[367] Accordingly, McConnell argue that democracy is better practiced in large institutions

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[364] Ibid., p.6

[365] Ibid., p.240

[366] Ehrenberg, Civil Society.
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[367] Richard Sennett, The Fall of the Public Man: On the Social Psychology of Capitalism, (New York: Random House, 1978).

characterized by the "impersonality" often identified with bureaucracies. According to McConnell, the impersonality associated with bureaucracies can potentially avoid arbitrariness by putting in place common procedures and practices. However, such an argument should not be pushed too far, for such a trend could be very dehumanizing.

Therefore, the implication is not that local organizations are not conducive to the expansion of meaningful democracy. Nonetheless, changes are necessary. Based on these arguments, Ehrenberg writes that contrary to the core assumption of contemporary democratic theory that strengthening civil society will lead naturally to improved democracy, "Taken by itself, "civil society" can serve freedom or reinforce inequality. There is nothing inherent that drives it toward plurality, equality, or participation."[368]

David Harvey has addressed whether social movements can bridge the gap between localism and larger political concerns and counter hegemony.[369] In this regard, building solidarities is crucial to such efforts aimed at radical democratization. Often, social movements start by addressing particular social problems that confront the lives of people in certain localities. While initially "particularistic" they also contain within them the seeds of wider, more "universal" social movements that address the overall power relations within a given society. However, whether such movements remain particularistic or become more inclusive depends on the prevailing vision of politics and concomitant actions. Specifically, inclusive social movements that seek social change are constructed on the basis of mass mobilizations by building solidarities established through dialogue with communities.

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[368] Ehrenberg, Civil Society, p.241

[369] Harvey, Spaces of Capital.

Harvey has addressed the question of the counter-hegemonic possibilities of social movements, which according to him are often characteristic of "militant particularism." According to Harvey, the counter-hegemonic potential of a social movement depends largely on how the dialectic between the particular and universal is understood.

Harvey says that militant particularism holds that "all politics … have their origins in the collective development of a particular political vision on the part of particular persons in particular places at particular times."[370] The important issue, following this premise, is "how and when such militant particularisms become internally coherent enough and ultimately embedded in or metamorphosed into a broader politics."[371]

Drawing on home-owner associations in the US, Harvey argued that such militant particularisms often promote business rather than social change. Such movements that promote particular interests, in effect, preclude a search for alternatives "no matter how ecologically wise or socially just."[372] Such exclusiveness often visible in local activism can have undesired impact for broader politics that seek social change.

However, local activism also may provide opportunities for broader politics that challenge the *status quo*. Critical to exploring such possibilities is how a social movement addresses the question of particularity. Using the example of home owner associations in the US, Harvey shows how communities are imagined and constructed opens possibilities for broader counter hegemonic platforms. According to Harvey, a community must not

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[370] Ibid, p.190

[371] Ibid.

[372] Ibid.

be understood as a thing; instead, it should be understood as a "process of coming together."[373] Harvey says: "It is therefore important to understand the processes that produce, sustain and dissolve the contingent patterns of solidarity that lie at the basis of this 'thing' we call 'a community'… Exactly how a structure of something called community gets precipitated out of the social process deserves careful attention."[374]

Harvey points out that the production of a community is essentially political. Harvey's conclusion regarding the processes that lead to the self-definition of a community, as "for-itself," in particular and exclusivist ways is significant for other grassroots social movements: "although community 'in itself' has meaning as part of a broader politics, community 'for itself' almost invariably degenerates into regressive exclusions and fragmentations."[375] Such institutionalization can undo the political possibilities that gave birth to communities (and social movements).

On the other hand, the only way to continue as agents of broad-based social change is for communities and social movements to "remain strongly nurtured by continuous processes of solidarity formation and reaffirmation."[376] The overall significance of communities and social movements, for Harvey, is as "crucial *mediators* between individual persons and a more general politics."[377]

The crucial task in building solidarities is the articulation of particular problems in inclusive ways by analyzing the hegemonic system, so that all plans resonate with those

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[373] Ibid., p.192

[374] Ibid.

[375] Ibid., p.193

[376] Ibid.

[377] Ibid. (italics original)

who the movement seeks to build solidarities. The dialectics between universality and particularity are thus at the core of building relevant social movements. The key is to move away both from the limits of particularity and the abstractness of the universal. Harvey says that dialectics is helpful in this regard: "… universality always exists *in relation* to particularity; neither can be separated from the other even though they are distinctive moments within our conceptual operations and practical engagements."[378] Such a maneuver between the particular and general is necessitated by the need to unravel the contents of hegemony.

Civil Society and Social Inequalities

At the core of democratic potentials of civil society is the question of social inequalities of various sorts, including race, class, caste, and gender. Practices within liberal societies often lack the all-important democratic content when the question of social power is left unanalyzed. Therefore, a serious problem of contemporary times is that decisions are made by the powerful on behalf of the powerless, but to the detriment of the latter. Citing a famous study of a New England town meeting and egalitarian workplace by Jane Mansbridge,[379] Ehrenberg points out that the former "found a powerful tendency to assume that established residents and the wealthy were most capable of discovering and organizing community's interest."[380] In discussions, based on the "imperative" of cohesion and common perspective, members of such organizations

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[378] Ibid., p. 194

[379] Jane Mansbridge, Beyond Adversary Democracy, (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1983).

[380] Ehrenberg, Civil Society, p. 243

are often pressured to rally around proposals coming from those seen as "authorities." Given that authority is legitimized power,[381] those with power have advantages often constituted along the lines of race, class, or gender.

Sydney Verba and colleagues in *Voice and Equality* conclude that income disparities, as a marker of class, is a crucial indicator of political participation. Ehrenberg sums up the findings of this study: "Verba's civil society is a sphere of economic inequality and privilege. It is thoroughly penetrated by class relations, and its unequal distribution of political resources is a function of economic life."[382]

All too often, the argument in favor of intermediate organizations, or civil society, is made on the basis of a moral appeal that local people know what is best for them. While such decentralization may advance the cause of self-determination – a principle so fundamental to meaningful democracy – the latter is more closely tied to the social inequalities that are produced and reproduced in everyday interactions. According to Ehrenberg, in place of investing faith in civil society, based on such moral principles, what is required is a concrete analysis of the way power works in the social world. In other words, critically and reflexively examining and unraveling the social inequalities that structure everyday interactions, along with local intermediate organizations are critical to rethinking civil society. Such examinations inform counter-hegemonic action aimed at democratizing of social relations.

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[381] Max Weber, "Class, Status, Party" in David B. Grusky (Ed.), <u>Social Stratification: Class, Race, and Gender in Sociological Perspective</u>, 2nd ed., (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 2001).

[382] Sydney Verba, Kay Lehman Schlozman, and Henry E. Brady, <u>Voice and Equality: Civic Voluntarism in American Politics</u>, (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1995), p.245

Civil Society and Hegemony in Plachimada

Based on the above discussion, civil society is best deployed in relation to other dimensions of social existence. In other words, rather than assert the discreteness of these "spheres," the social context of civil society is very important. Such a view of civil society can contribute to a sociological understanding of the processes whereby domination is produced in society, particularly in attempts to counter these structures. In the light of the above discussion of civil society, and prior to a discussion of the contours of counter-hegemonic action, how hegemony operated as part of Plachimada movement becomes very important.

Joseph Femia defines Gramsci's view of hegemony as "the predominance attained by consent rather than force of one class or group over other classes."[383] Hence, hegemony may mean consent, which by extension leads to conformity or, following the patterns of the "mainstream," in an unreflective strategy of action.[384] Nonetheless, hegemony may also mean ideological consensus, whereby persons may believe that their values or needs correspond to the society or nation.[385] In general, acceptance of the prevailing *status quo* of social relations and the structures of domination, irrespective of whether they are detrimental, can be thought of as hegemony.[386] Clearly, this does not mean that violence or the threat of violence is entirely absent in hegemonic processes. Intermediaries in the civil and political society, including institutions or persons, are

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[383] Joseph V. Femia, "Hegemony and Consciousness in the Thought of Antonio Gramsci," <u>Political Studies</u> (1975, 23), p. 31.

[384] Joseph V. Femia, <u>Gramsci's Political Thought: Hegemony, Consciousness and the Revolutionary Process,</u> (London: Clarendon Press, 1981).

[385] Teodros Kiros, <u>Towards the Construction of a Theory of Political Action.</u>

[386] Gramsci, <u>Prison Notebooks</u>.

thought to be central to the processes of establishing hegemony. However, depending on the strength of the hegemonic system, violence remains an option for the ruling elite to ensure the perpetuation of the social order.

In Gramsci's work, hegemony is related to other central ideas, such as will, the importance of philosophy, or the leadership role of intellectuals.[387] As was pointed out in a previous chapter, Gramsci sought to move away from the "economism" that characterized most of the Marxism theorizing of his time. Those who adhered to economism believed in independently existing "scientific laws" that societies followed on their "path to progress." Based on such a belief, political parties and oppositional social movements often limit their actions to call for minor adjustments in people's material conditions of existence. On the contrary, Gramsci believed that social change should be brought about not because of objective factors, but through the (re)intervention of the "subject" – or the exercising of human will. Social change, for Gramsci, was not merely characterized by changes in the external environment but also signaled a change in the consciousness of people. In the end, Gramsci believed that the dialectic between the two is at the core of progressive political action.

Accordingly, Gramsci thought that philosophy is at the heart of social change. Gramsci believed that all human beings are philosophers, or potential philosophers. However, most people, by adhering to the "common sense" view of the world, resort to what he called "spontaneous philosophy."[388] In societies where the hegemony of the ruling class is writ large, common sense may reflect the hegemonic interests of the ruling

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[387] Ibid.

[388] Ibid. This point is further explained in Kiros, Towards the Construction of a Theory of Political Action.

class. Political action aimed at democratic social change, Gramsci said, should bring about alterations in the consciousness of people, in addition to social relations.[389] Such a change in consciousness is a product of critical philosophy. In other words, as part of collective action, people move from spontaneous philosophy to critical philosophy, thereby challenging hegemony. According to Gramsci, the intermediary organizations, such as political parties or social movements, aid this collective action by unraveling hegemony.[390]

Predicated on the role of the intermediaries in civil society, hegemony is fundamentally attached to leadership. Leaders typically claim to be intellectuals, in that they claim to know how "things work." As Kiros says: "Hegemony, it is contended, is a particular type of leadership … [based] on the systematic spread of the world view of the "ruling class.""[391] Gramsci thought that typically implicit in the leadership provided by traditional intellectuals is the perpetuation of the *status quo*. On the other hand, counter-hegemonic collective action advances new types of leadership, particularly from among "organic intellectuals." The latter, emerging from the common folk or the "masses," are those who, through political action, have moved on from spontaneous to critical philosophy. In Gramsci's thinking, they represent the possibility that every human being is a philosopher or intellectual. By extension, they also reflect the important theoretical understanding that every human being can be a leader.[392]

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[389] Kiros, <u>Towards the Construction of a Theory of Political Action.</u>

[390] Gramsci, <u>Prison Notebooks</u>.

[391] Kiros, <u>Towards the Construction of a Theory of Political Action</u>, p.100.

[392] Gramsci, <u>Prison Notebooks.</u>

The upshot of this understanding is that leadership is not given *a priori* status. That is, a leader is not acknowledged to possess certain unique characteristics that are unavailable to others. Being a temporary arrangement, leadership understood this way is less alienating and encourages participatory action. This approach is in direct contrast to the "professionalization" of leadership and the concomitant division of labor (between workers and thinkers) found in many civil society organizations and political parties. According to Gramsci, organic leadership should encourage critical thinking among the masses too.[393] This incessant criticism, or the "ruthless criticism of all things known", becomes the basis of collective action oriented toward democratic social change.

The theoretical positions discussed above help clarify the processes operative in Plachimada more clearly. The establishment of the HCCB plant was consistent with the discourse of development that aided capitalist investment, which has emerged as a powerful part of the economistic view of society and progress. Given that substantial sections of Kerala's population had bought into the hegemonic discourse, the political and civil society, including the state and political parties, strove to bring about development in Plachimada. To the local communities already marginalized within the existing social arrangements, the hegemonic discourse of development and the accompanying practices gave persons hope. The local people, mostly tribal, were kept under the hegemonic system through a combination of caste-based practices, the threat of violence, and actual violence often unleashed by the agents of the state and the dominant classes.

Against this background, the HCCB plant materialized in Plachimada. However, soon, the reality dawned on the local people. They did not get the jobs they expected to

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[393] Ibid.

and the hopes of better quality of living were shattered. To the contrary, their very existence in Plachimada was threatened after they found that the ground water was polluted. Some of the local people, who were already active in several organizations that countered the onslaught on tribal people by mainstream institutions and dominant classes, took the lead in converting the intense displeasure of the local people into an organized social movement against the HCCB plant, the very hegemonic system that made the plant possible, and the oppressive social relations linked to the prevailing caste system.

Analysis of the reports of various respondents who participated in the research revealed that the movement, in the beginning stages, was characterized by relatively high levels of interaction between the local communities and the leadership that emerged from the local people. The movement leadership and the locals were involved in a reciprocal relationship, which is crucial for the democratization process. In other words, people of Plachimada, in the light of generations of oppression, wanted to initiate meaningful social transformation that would lead to the democratization of social relations. However, the movement participants came under severe pressure from the agents of the state, particularly the police and political parties, and the management of the HCCB plant who initiated legal process against these activists.

In this context, several voluntary organizations and individuals, including environmentalists, religious organizations, and youth groups extended support to the movement. In time, some of the activists from these civil society organizations, who had resources, emerged in leadership roles in the movement. With the movement advancing, the initial commitment to ground level mobilization, through building solidarities, was abandoned. Clearly, this new direction of was in tune with the how the movement

leadership came to view and deal with the problem. Specifically, the problem came to be defined narrowly as water depletion and pollution in Plachimada, which could be solved with the closure of the plant. In this sense, the purpose of social movement is narrowly defined as "problem solving." This study analyzed the activities of the new leaders and sought to understand the impact they had on the direction of the movement. In particular, the analysis explored the political vision of the civil society in Plachimada. Such a study was conducted on the basis of the recent theoretical assertions that civil society is the sphere of collective action that can spawn the radical democratization of social relations.

The analysis found that, as opposed to this view, civil society did not live up to this promise. The politics of civil society was premised on a one-dimensional view of society that affirmed the *status quo*. Much like what Gramsci refers to as "syndicalist" politics, the civil society leadership merely sought to define narrowly the problem.[394] The view was that if these leaders could lobby the state government to shut down of the plant, such a conclusion would spell victory for the movement. On the contrary, from the point of view of the local tribal communities, their conditions of existence were worse following the movement, with hardly any challenges posed to the prevailing social relations. Many felt embittered that the movement did not address their key concerns, thus clearly indicating the inability of its leaders to provide opportunities for democratic interaction among the various activists. The local people who initially formed the movement were treated as if they were mere appendages in a game whose fate was decided by the state, to which only the "experts" – politicians and civil society leadership – had access. Clearly, the movement was plagued by internal problems emanating from

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[394] Ibid.

the disjunction between the actions of the leadership and the aspirations of the local people.

The politics of the civil society in Plachimada can be described as oriented toward "mitigating" the effects of neoliberalism. This outlook is consistent with a realist view of the state and the existing politics and social relations taken uncritically as "givens." The post-colonial developmentalist state, which has been consistently a vehicle for perpetuating and consolidating of the hegemony of the ruling classes, was understood uncritically as an ally in the "struggle against the multinational corporation," despite the fact that the government has been the prime facilitator of "development from above." Underlying the decision to rely on the state for "grievance redressal" was the uncritical acceptance of the realist paradigm, within which civil society is submitted to the state, the preserver of social order. Consistent with the views of several commentators[395], civil society in Plachimada, instead of seeking to genuinely empower people to be agents of social change, in effect produced further "dependencies" and hindered democratic social change.

Based on the theories of hegemony proposed by Gramsci,[396] the civil society leadership did not have the political vision to mount a serious counter-hegemonic critique. As Gramsci pointed out, hegemony can be countered only when society gives primacy to human will and collective action. With ever increasing forms of social inequality, marginalization, and oppression all over the world, civil society has emerged as the promise of a better world. However, the structuralist differentiation of civil society

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[395] James Petras, The New Development Politics.

[396] Gramsci, Prison Notebooks.

and its institutions, particularly positioned in a hierarchical relationship with the state, means that civil society is bound by the traditional view of society that is characteristic of realism. Accordingly, social change is thought of as "external" to people. The work of civil society, based upon this premise, is defined as enabling people to adjust to the changes imposed on them by the "system," rather than empowering them to be agents of change.

But a better world has to be based on the premise that people, engaged in collective action, can move social relations in a more democratic direction. According to Gramsci, this idea requires an alternative view of society. Gramsci points out that "prediction" of what "ought to be" should be based on a radically different reading of the present – one that is fundamentally different from the ontologically realist readings that inform most of the "common sense" renditions of society.[397] According to him, the present and past are linked together as a "movement."[398] However, there is no determinacy to this movement that links the past and the present, and by extension portends the future. In other words, Gramsci denounces the belief that "historical progress" is determined by external forces that act in a law-like fashion. As opposed to this determinism, the basis of a movement that unites the past and present is collective action based on human will that simultaneously changes the participants' consciousness, as they seek to alter the ways of collective existence.

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[397] Kiros, Towards the Construction of a Theory of Political Action.p.246.

[398] Gramsci, Prison Notebooks, p. 358-360.

Final Thoughts: Civil Society and Counter Hegemonic Collective Action

Based on the lessons from Plachimada, what are some of the important considerations for inaugurating counter hegemonic collective action? Given that civil society, in its current incarnations, does not promote radical democratic social transformation, how can this realm be rethought? This section will deal with some of the theoretical and practical considerations of rethinking civil society as an arena of democratic social change through collective action.

A crucial requirement for such forms of collective action aimed at countering hegemony is the image of social order that guides any intervention. Despite the popular emphasis on the Lockean social contract, as the governing principle of contemporary liberal democracy and the so called "freedoms" citizens enjoy, this imagery is informed by the Hobbesian anxiety of the world descending into chaos with possible "war of all against all." Such emphasis on the imposition and maintenance of social order, even at the cost of individual and collective freedoms, is at the core of realism. In the context of neoliberalism, with accelerated accumulation on a global scale, realism has to be read alongside the fact that states are increasingly seen as partisan, thereby dropping the pretence of class compromise that characterized Fordism and postcolonial development. In Plachimada, this bias was clear in the anxiety of the state to ensure that "potential investors" are not upset because of a popular rebellion against big corporations.

Against this background, civil society, in order to emerge as a sphere of counter-hegemonic action, has to be rescued from being a "sub" sphere or moment within the overall "system." Fundamental to this anti-realist maneuver is the employment of critical philosophy. However, critical philosophizing may not be a sufficient to stimulate the

social change required to rethink civil society. Critical philosophy, nonetheless, should be at the core of meaningful collective action, thereby making possible the unity of theory and action.

Given that civil society is where the hegemonic forces that control the state seek to legitimate their social power, this sphere is where challenges to such authority is legitimated. Therefore, civil society is the sphere of action, rather than a mere component of a larger structure. Clearly, civil society and counter-hegemonic social movements are intertwined closely in this new rendition. However, the superficial distinctions imposed by modernity – such as those between community and civil society – will have to break down, as part of this renewal.

Murphy writes about a new view of civil society from Latin America where the distinction between community and civil society are rendered redundant.[399] Instead, the emphasis of this new reading of civil society is on its content, rather than form. According to Murphy, the primary focus of the new civil society is the "full participation of the citizenry in the planning and operation of a society's institutions."[400] But clearly, the institutions that characterize modern civil society will have to undergo democratic transformation. Unlike in the modernist theory, they are not autonomous and coercive.

In the new civil society, people are active agents in constituting these institutions. With the breakdown of this distinction, the need for "experts" and "professionals" schooled in the ways of the system to mediate between the hapless people and institutions is passé. On the other hand, popular participation will have to ensure that people move on

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[399] John W. Murphy, "A New View of Civil Society from Latin America", (Unpublished manuscript).

[400] Ibid.; p.1

from what Gramsci referred to as "spontaneous philosophy" to "critical philosophy,"[401] thus producing a change in consciousness that heralds a new type of individual.[402]

In modernist thought, an individual is thought to be categorically separate from other individuals. Particularly within the context of neoliberalism, the idea of the individual as the absolute and indissoluble basis of society is advocated. In this theory, individuals are thought to exist in isolation, as monads with windows, who come together to form society through the efforts of institutions such as the market. Such externally imposed subjectivities, accordingly, provide individuals with their required 'identities'. As part of rethinking civil society, individuals have to be viewed as existing in relation to one another, thereby forming society.

Borrowing Gramsci's metaphor, society must be thought of as a movement that connects the past and present. The agent that connects these dimensions is the new individual. Such an individual is characterized by reflective consciousness, and is not merely the recipient and processor of information. Rather, the individual as social agent is built on the understanding that society and individual can not actualize without each other. In other words, the new consciousness is dialectical. Such individuals are necessarily political and have the potential to be self-limiting participants in the constitution of society. That is, these politicized individuals that constitute society are capable of addressing questions related to the nature of social power.

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[401] Gramsci, Prison Notebooks.

[402] The idea of the 'new man' in the writings of Che Guevera has received some attention lately. See Miguel Martinez-Saenz, "Che Guevera's New Man: Embodying a Communitarian Attitude" in Latin American Perspectives (The Struggle Continues: Consciousness, Social Movement, and Class Action), (31, 6, Nov, 2004), pp. 15-30.

In sum, the practices of counter-hegemonic social movements should be based on their own vision of society. In Plachimada, the movement was debilitated by the unreflexive actions of the leadership, which, in the advanced phase of the movement, primarily emerged from the leaders of civil society. In being unreflexive, they reproduced within the movement the structures of domination prevalent in the mainstream society, whose practices these critics sought originally to oppose. In doing so, they produced dependencies within the movement that fundamentally obscured its political vision. To put Plachimada movement in perspective, what was required of civil society leadership is a commitment to a political vision that includes radical democratic social change. Such an approach had to practice democratization within the movement. This strategy, in turn, should have been the basis of building solidarities on a broader basis that challenged the prevailing hegemonic structures.

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Appendix I

Probe Questions for In-depth Interviews with Study Participants

1. What are the main issues that the Plachimada movement tried to address?

2. What is the nature of the social structures in the community and how do they operate?

3. How did people come together to address these issues?

4. What is the nature of your work as part of the movement?

5. What types of action do the activists in Plachimada movement plan and implement?

6. What kind of organizations extended support to the movement?

7. What is the organizational structure of the movement?

8. How does the movement mobilize the required resources?

9. How does your organization decide on the nature of work as part of the movement?

10. What are the avenues for your organization to interact with the local community?

11. What does democracy mean to your organization?

12. How are decisions made within the movement at various points? Who made the decisions?

13. What are the avenues that the activists have to interact with each other and participate in the movement?

14. How do you find out if your organization's work is reflective of the interests of the community?

15. How does your organization perceive the influence of larger, global level forces in the functioning of local democracy in Plachimada?

16. How does the movement interact with the political establishment?