NEOLIBERALISM, COUNTER-HEGEMONY AND POLITICS OF CIVIL SOCIETY: A STUDY OF THE PLACHIMADA MOVEMENT IN KERALA, INDIA

Ajay Panicker
Assistant Professor of Sociology, St Cloud State University, Minnesota, USA

ABSTRACT

Neoliberalism has contributed to increased sense of insecurity among marginalized communities globally. In this context, it is widely believed that civil society can be a platform for political action to advance progressive social change. Drawing on Gramscian linkage between civil society and hegemony, this paper attempts to examine the limits to the possibilities of civil society. Based on an examination of the Plachimada movement in Kerala, this paper argues that the hegemonic processes that structure unequal relationship between civil society and political society.

Introduction

Neoliberalism is understood as a class project with a programmatic vision for enhancing capitalist accumulation on a planetary scale (Harvey 2005). Its proponents, the transnational capitalist class, have sought to implement, globally, a new social and political order that is conducive to the aim of accumulation by imposing free-market oriented "reforms," including easy flow of capital and commodities across national borders, and reorienting economic development in terms favorable to investors in order to achieve high levels of economic growth (Sklair 2001, 2005). As a result, commons are being privatized (accumulation by dispossession) at a higher rate on a global scale, while states have scaled back on social welfare spending in the name of fiscal responsibility (Harvey 2003). It is widely reported that globalization of neoliberal capitalism has resulted in increased sense of insecurity and experience of exclusion among the already marginalized communities (Saad-Filho & Johnston 2005).

In this context of the scaling back of the state from welfare and social development, civil society organizations have been prescribed as an alternative to the dependency on state (Sinha 2005). As

scholars have pointed out, however, civil society is a concept that has seen different interpretations in its long career (Kumar 1993). Enlightenment thinker Hegel thought of a space between the state and family where the emerging bourgeoisie could conduct business. In his analysis of American democracy, de Tocqueville thought of civil society as a sphere of voluntary associationism that through its spontaneous organizations could work as an anti-dote to the power of the state (Ehrenberg 1999). The neoliberal era has witnessed the celebration of civil society organizations, such as NGOs, self help groups etc., and that capture the essence of the above mentioned perspectives.

Gramsci, on the other hand, drew on Marx's work and theorized civil society as an arena of struggle imbued with emancipatory potential. Civil society as a concept is theorized in relation to concepts such as historic bloc and hegemony (Buttigieg 1995). A historic bloc is an alliance of social forces. Hegemony is a complex concept in Gramsci that refers to the normalized and routinized relationship of domination among social forces. Dominant historic bloc attempts to legitimize the prevailing exploitative relationships among social forces in civil society. Here, civil society is not understood merely as institutions or organizations but as a "ground that sustained the hegemony of the bourgeoisie but also that on which an emancipatory counter hegemony could be constructed." (Cox 1999:3)

Civil society is a site of struggle wherein hegemonic forces that attempt to maintain the status quo of social relations, by developing appropriate institutional and organizational forms that maintain the social order, come into conflict with counter hegemonic forces that attempt to overcome the prevailing hegemonic social relations. While the hegemonic forces benefit from the status quo of power relations through forms of domination and privilege, the counter hegemonic forces often are derived from those that experience exclusion or marginalization, exploitation and various forms of oppression. These two sets of forces are locked in 'war of position', long-term strategic efforts to maintain or overcome hegemony.

Since the advent of neoliberal globalization, theoretical and policy focus on civil society has gained much traction. On the one hand, civil society, as NGOs and self help groups, has been

celebrated as a way forward. On the other hand, the literature on oppositional civil society has focused largely on civil society as counter-politics to neoliberalism broadly. If hegemony is a process of legitimization of status quo of unequal social relations, does hegemony contribute to establishing limits to the possibilities of progressive change?

Following Munck (2006), who calls for bringing politics back in to the study of civil society, the purpose of this paper is to examine the politics of civil society in a developing country context of Kerala, India. The paper will attempt to locate civil society – both in its integrative and counter-hegemonic forms – within the politics generated by the neoliberal project of social transformation. The paper will examine the development of civil society Kerala and then continue to examine the politics of civil society within a social movement initiated by marginalized tribal communities.

The Argument

Kerala, once a highly hierarchical and exclusivist society, has effectively countered the hegemonic historic bloc of dominant castes and classes through social and political activism. Activism based on egalitarian values have generated progressive social change, contributed to more freedoms and expanded civil society (Oommen 1975). However the social-changes over the course of the last century have led to the reconstitution of the hegemony of a dominant historic bloc that is committed to the development compromise (Heller 2007). Even though the hegemony of this historic bloc is characteristically different from the earlier one, it continues to foster social exclusion and oppression of marginalized communities.

Neoliberal social changes have further contributed to the marginalization of poor, Dalit and tribal communities. While these communities do not have the means to partake in the neoliberal market, they often have to bear the brunt of development practices that are dependent on economic globalization. In this paper, I examine an effort to resist neoliberal development by subordinate and marginalized social groups in Kerala. I argue that, such efforts aided by civil society organizations, experience severe limits to possibilities in the absence of a Gramscian war of position. I point out that hegemony, operating in subtle and ways unintended by activists,

limits the scope of social change. Drawing on the case of the Plachimada movement in Kerala, I examine how hegemony operates in the interaction between political society and state on the one hand civil society organizations engaged in counter hegemonic movements on the other. I suggest that while the instrumentality of winning key battles may buoy a social movement, countering hegemonic structures require reflexive praxis based on analysis of dominant hegemonic social order.

Through an in-depth examination of the interaction between political society that represents the hegemonic bloc and civil society in the Plachimada movement – a social movement initiated by the people of Plachimada, a tribal hamlet in Kerala, against their conditions of oppression as well as a Coca Cola factory that was thought to be the cause of depletion and pollution of ground water – I will explain the way hegemony operates to limit the possibilities of social change. Studies have focused on how unequal power relations are addressed through democratic processes within social movements (della Porta 2009). This study focuses on not only the internal relations within a social movement, but on how these internal relations are often influenced by its relationship with the hegemonic bloc and the political society that represents it.

The data for this study was gathered in several rounds of fieldwork conducted between June 2006 and July 2012. Methods of data gathering included qualitative research methods such as participant observation and in-depth interviewing. The primary data was supplemented with archival and secondary data gathered from journals, reports, etc.

In order to demonstrate the hegemonic relationship between civil society and political society[1] in Plachimada, this paper first presents a historical account of the development of civil society in Kerala. This account draws out the nature of the hegemony prevalent at various stages of the civil society's advancement. This historical account demonstrates the nature of hegemony

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[1] The concept political society, here, is used to refer to not only the state and political parties that vie for control of the state, but also the many affiliated and feeder organizations of political parties. In the case of Kerala, a number of trade unions, youth and peasant organizations etc., while maintaining a modicum of autonomy, are affiliated with various political parties.

operating currently in Kerala, in the concept of development compromise. This section examines the changes in Kerala's experiments with development, focusing on the human development oriented model and the more recent neoliberal turn. The following section describes the marginalization of tribal people and their exclusion from the development compromise. This section also serves as a background to the narrative of the Plachimada movement, followed by a section on the establishment of the HCCB plant in Plachimada. A section describing the movement is followed by analysis of how hegemony operated in the relationship between civil society and political society in the context of the movement.

Civil Society in Kerala

Once an intensely hierarchical society based on casteism that severely restricted the individual's freedom of expression based on where they were in the hierarchy, Kerala's social transformation in the direction of egalitarianism has been paralleled by a long history of the development of civil society. A number of scholars have pointed out that, through a number of mobilized efforts at democratic social transformation, Kerala achieved improvements in human development (Parayil 2000). In the book *Development as Freedom*, Sen (1999) points out the inter-linkages between increased human capabilities and expanded freedoms. Likewise Oommen (2009: 30) points out that there is a "strong correlation between HDI and HFI"[2]. An important part of these expanded capabilities, according to Sen, is that they allow individuals to participate more fully in the public sphere and collective decision-making. In other words, these capabilities expand the realization of freedoms,a necessary condition for expansion of civil society.

The development of civil society in Kerala can be sketched out through three broad phases – the phase of social reform movements that challenged the hegemony of landlordism and caste hierarchies as well as opposed the colonial regime in the 19th and 20th centuries; the phase of direct class struggle, that started with the election of a government headed by the Communist Party of India (CPI) in 1957 until the 1970s when the land reform act passed in 1969 and other welfare oriented pro-working class legislations were implemented; and a more recent phase, in

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[2] HDI stands for Human Development Index; HFI stands for Human Freedom Index.

the post-land reforms era, starting with the Silent Valley movement and characterized by several movements emerging to address important problems arising as part of progressive social change. To be sure, while class struggle was more overtly visible during the middle phase, it may not be mistakenly understood that class politics was not a factor during the other two phases. A key underlying characteristic of the civil society that has been developing through these phases is the oppositional, and often counter-hegemonic, thrust based on the normative need to realize, in practice, the ideals of egalitarianism.

The basis for a new, emergent, civil society, understood as an associational space characterized by individuals unencumbered of traditionalistic relations and hierarchies, was paved by a number of social reform movements that challenged caste-based practices that effectively barred a vast majority of the population from participating in the public sphere in the 19th and early part of the 20th centuries. Both political and economic factors, as well as the spread of modern education, especially in Travancore and Kochi – two of the southern kingdoms that, along with Malabar, formed the state of Kerala in 1956 – during the nineteenth and early twentieth century contributed to the context for these challenges to casteism.

Sree Narayana Guru, a spiritual and social reformist leader of the Ezhava caste, defied the casteist stipulations that barred members of this caste from entering temples. At the turn of the 20th century, Ayyankali[3], through the organization *Sadhujana Paripalana Sangham*, organized a revolt by agricultural workers to eradicate untouchability, improve wages of agrarian workers, and allow children of lower caste members to attend schools (Oommen 2009:30). The Vaikom Satyagraha, a movement that denounced prevalent notions of casteist pollution and ensured access for all caste members to Hindu temples.

These were among the several movements that opposed and eventually overturned the casteist hegemony that restricted freedoms and maintained the exclusivity of the public sphere in Kerala. These initiatives also led to the formation of various associations that continued the legacy of

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[3] A social reformist leader of Dalits in erstwhile Travancore region of Kerala

caste reform in Kerala throughout the 20th century, to seek improvements in quality of life by providing more access to government jobs, health services and education (Heller 2007).

Peasant movements and trade unions that emerged in various parts of Kerala from the first half of the twentieth century contributed to the push for reforming the tenancy system, challenging the hegemony of landlords, and thereby indirectly contributing to the expansion of civil society. Jose points out that in Malabar, peasant movements that had challenged the *janmi*[4] system "achieved distinct organizational shape and gathered momentum in the thirties and forties [of the twentieth century, and were] organized by strong left-oriented leadership" (Jose 1977: 30).

The *Malabar Karshaka Sangham*[5] waged a number of agitations that led to reform of laws governing land tenancy. Likewise, in Alappuzha, a main rice growing region in erstwhile Travancore, industrial workers employed in coir industry were organized into trade unions during the 1920s and 30s, including a General Strike in 1938 (Jose 1977). The leadership of the industrial trade unions, especially those in the coir industry, was also instrumental in organizing agricultural workers in Alappuzha (Jose 1977: 34). Overall, these early efforts helped bring about radical changes in the social relations prevailing in agrarian and industrial sectors and provided the thrust for the emergence of left political parties and legislating land reforms.

The spirit of democratization and the strong thrust of anti-casteist egalitarianism that these movements generated, along with the nationalist movement that struggled for decolonization during the first half of the twentieth century, paved the way for progressive political activism to take root in Kerala. The prevailing counter-hegemonic spirit saw the rise of a strong socialist movement with widespread support around the middle of the 20th century. Kerala elected a government led by the Communist Party of India, the first ever instance in the world of a Communist party coming to power through electoral participation, in 1957.

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[4] A form of landlordism practiced in Kerala at the time.
[5] Translated as Farmer's Forum of Malabar.

The emergence of a modern civil society was further provided impetus by the historic land reform legislation that was implemented in the 1970s at the behest of the left government that ruled the state. The land reforms in Kerala, while seen as incomplete[6], set limits on the amount of land that could be owned. The state took over the excess land and redistributed much of those among erstwhile tenants and farm laborers. Even though Herring (1980) has pointed out that while the rich peasants benefited the most, small tenants and landless workers benefited the least, the popular mobilization leading to the land reforms act expanded rights awareness among the lower segments of society.

The legislation and implementation of the land reforms was among the most significant state policy in Kerala, since its formation as a state in independent India. Abolition of landlordism that resulted from the land reforms was an important factor contributing to the development of modern civil society. Following the land reform efforts, a number of welfare-oriented legislations, such as the Agricultural Workers Reform Act (passed in the 1970s) that improved the working and living conditions of agricultural laborers, were enacted (Parayil 1996). Despite relatively low GDP growth during this time period, Kerala had relatively higher achievements to show in Human Development Indicators. Expanded capabilities such as high levels of literacy, newspaper readership and political participation have contributed to expansion of civil society in Kerala.

The enactment and implementation of laws relating to land reform and welfare consolidated the space of parliamentary politics into two political formations – the Left Democratic Front (LDF) led by the communist parties, and the United Democratic Front (UDF) led by the Indian National Congress (INC) – in the early 1980s. Since then, the two political alliances – representing center-left and center-right political orientations respectively – have been elected into office every alternate electoral cycle. A third force, the rightwing *Bharatiya Janata Party* (BJP) has struggled to gain acceptance and remained largely marginal in Kerala's politics.

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[6] For instance, large commercial plantations were excluded from the ambit of the land reform act of 1969.

In the post-land reform era, a more activist oriented civil society emerged in Kerala in the context of consolidation of parliamentary politics into a routinized control of power between the two political formations. Kerala *Sasthra Sahitya Parishad* (KSSP) or the Kerala Science and Literary Movement, a left leaning organization that sought to bring about social change by popularizing science and scientific temper among the people of Kerala. The spirit of questioning that this people's science movement generated led to posing a popular challenge to the proposal to construct a dam to generate hydroelectric power in Silent Valley, a rain forest region in Kerala that is home to some of the most endangered species.

The Save Silent Valley movement that took off in the 1970s pointed out the enormous ecological damage that would be the cost of this form of development. The movement mobilized support by generating awareness about this problem in villages and towns across Kerala. KSSP that championed this mobilization effort also grew in stature. By the mid-1980s the government was forced to scrap this project and Silent Valley was declared a national park. The struggle to save Silent Valley became the first movement in modern Kerala to successfully challenge developmental policies that could potentially cause harm to society and nature despite the political formations in the state being initially in support of the project.

This movement contributed to the development of civil society in Kerala as a sphere of critique, debate and dialogue concerning the direction of development and social change. The activist orientation and the spirit of critique of this movement, and several others that followed, contributed to the development of civil society as a sphere of contestation where established norms and hegemonic ideals are critically examined. This civil society thereby expanded the public sphere as an arena where not only the established political parties contested for power, but as a space where popular alternatives could be conceived, developed and implemented.

Like elsewhere in the developing world, civil society in Kerala has had to address development, and the problems arising from policies associated with economic development. The Silent Valley

movement[7] was a key point of departure for civil society in Kerala in at least two significant aspects: this movement was among the first efforts in Kerala by civil society activists, despite the lack of support of well mobilized political parties, to problematize developmental priorities and generate wide ranging discussions about the impact of development. Secondly, this was also the first significant movement in recent history that showed divergence of views between the established political parties, or the political sphere, and civil society activists – with the political sphere often supporting development projects and civil society opposing not merely these projects for the dire impacts they have on society and nature but also the hegemony of developmentalism. The politics of civil society in Kerala since has had to address these two aspects that became prominent with the Silent Valley movement.

Development and Civil Society in Kerala

Historically, two strong currents are discernible in developmental processes in Kerala. Kerala is renowned for a model of development that emphasized human development despite sustaining lower economic growth until recently, a model that drew on the egalitarian impulse generated by the social reform movements and the implementation of land reforms. On the other hand, Kerala, as a province of India, has been subject to neoliberal forms of development since the Indian government initiated economic reforms in the 1990s. The tensions between the two models of development and the locally specific initiatives to resolve these tensions have generated a number of social movements, an important dimension of Kerala's civil society.

The "Kerala model of development" has challenged the conventional wisdom that causally links economic growth with poverty reduction and other forms of social development. According to Parayil, a champion of the Kerala model, in contrast to the experience of growth based models elsewhere in the Third World failing to reduce poverty, population growth, income inequalities and ecological destruction, "Kerala has stood out in demonstrating through democratic means that radical improvements in quality of life of ordinary citizens are possible without high economic growth and without consuming large quantities of energy and other natural resources." (1996: 942)

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[7] Many interviewees referred to Silent.

Advancements in human development in Kerala were achieved partly by mobilizing civil society, with the active participation of political parties, resulting in the state enacting legislation and implementing the policy in the direction of progressive social change. Civil society mobilization often took the form of active campaigns to spread awareness among people about social issues. Campaigns were organized to control population growth rates, reduce infant mortality rates, community health initiatives to improve nutritional intake, and expanding literacy with remarkable results.

The literacy movement in Kerala, initiated in the late 1980s, was another important achievement of civil society mobilization. KSSP led the campaign, with the support of the left parties and governmental agencies, towards achieving total literacy through people's participation. Several voluntary instructors worked in communities, teaching individuals at various stages of their life cycle to read and write. In 1989, Kottayam, a town in Kerala, was declared fully literate. This model was followed later in elsewhere in Kerala, producing over a million newly literate people. (Kumar, S.M., 1993)

The state in Kerala initiated efforts to reduce poverty by establishing fair-price shops that made available essential food grains at subsidized rates. The development priorities also led to investment in hospitals and rural health dispensaries, increasing access to public transportation, expanding educational opportunities at the primary and secondary level. According to Chakraborty, the "quantity of school education provided for school-age children in Kerala has been consistently much higher than in any other state in India" (2005: 545). People of Kerala tend to participate in electoral politics enthusiastically; they have high rates of newspaper readership and media consumption. Overall, Kerala's developmental efforts have contributed to increasing participation in public sphere and to development of civil society as an associational space.

While an associational and participatory space, civil society is also a space where hegemonies are constructed and contested. Through discussions and debates in civil society political discourses are developed that attempt to capture a version of the reality from the hegemonic or

the counter-hegemonic perspectives. The anti-casteist, egalitarian ideals of the mid-20th century had embraced a kind of modernization, based on rational thinking, and public participation that would help shed the traditional values and hierarchies that structured social relations. These ideals had informed much of the development model.

Neoliberal Developmentalism in Kerala and Coca Cola in Plachimada

By the 1980s, however, the optimism of such progressive social change was considerably dented by the reality of high levels of unemployment, especially of the educated. Sustained high levels of unemployment saw increased levels of emigration, especially to the Persian Gulf, which in turn, led to the growth of a consuming middle class. The lack of economic growth and the reluctance of private capitalists to invest in Kerala were identified as the main reasons for the stagnation and unemployment. High levels of trade unionism and labor militancy and the overall left dominated politics in Kerala were blamed as reasons for the lack of private investment producing job growth.

It is in this context that the federal government in India in 1991, faced with a balance of payment crisis, decided to restructure the economy, loosening state controls, aiding privatization and inviting foreign capitalists to invest in India. The middle classes in India largely espoused these policies, consistent with the globalization of neoliberalism. In Kerala, emigration had caused rise in incomes of those that were able to find employment in the Persian Gulf and elsewhere. Remittances from the emigrants increased family incomes and thereby changed lifestyles and consumption practices, and improved quality of life and economic status (Zachariah et al 2001; Banerjee et al 2002). Since the late 1980s, Kerala's economic growth improved and has been growing at close to the all-India average. (Chakraborty 2005) This consuming middle class, exposed to the "fruits" of economic growth elsewhere, became votaries of policies that supported economic growth.

Since the 1990s, concerns had been raised about whether the Kerala model, achieving high human development through state sponsored programs despite low economic growth, was sustainable in the long term. The discourse that despite Kerala's achievements in human

development, it has lagged behind other states in economic growth and employment generation because of failure to attract private capital investment became more entrenched. Increasing debt in the 1980s had raised concerns about whether the welfare system practiced in Kerala was sustainable. As a result, even though Kerala adopted economic reforms only in 2001 (Jeromi 2005), by the late 1980s, the discourse of development had shifted considerably from modernization with an egalitarian focus to developmentalism, based on economic growth as an end in itself.

The middle classes that were exposed to the opportunities for better employment and consumption for similar segments of the population that rapid growth oriented development bring elsewhere, largely espoused developmentalist discourse. By the 1990s, leaders of the left parties who had championed the Kerala model were also convinced that Kerala had to seek industrial expansion by inviting capitalists to invest in the state. Given that Kerala experienced capital shortage, such investment had to be brought in from elsewhere.

On the other hand, the general perception of Kerala as a haven of militant trade unionism had largely kept capitalists away from investing. In order to resolve this problem, the dominant left parties, led by the Communist Party of India (Marxist) or CPM, affected a class compromise between capital and labor in order to generate economic growth. Heller (2007) refers to this as development compromise, a response to what was understood as a crisis of the Kerala model in the 1980s. As part of this compromise, workers were exhorted to work harder and reduce the man-days lost due to labor militancy, with results showing increased productivity. Further capitalist investment and generation of value, it was argued, was necessary to further improve the conditions of workers. On the other hand, the state committed itself to continuing the welfare and redistributive policies that had improved the conditions of the organized working class. Overall, the development compromise entails a shift, often witnessed as part of neoliberal reform of welfare systems, towards increasing market orientation.

This development compromise shifted the hegemonic arrangement that was achieved in the 1970s. The 1970s had seen the consolidation of CPM's efforts to bring together industrial

workers, peasants and agricultural workers all under one umbrella as part of establishing the hegemony, through various forms of class struggle, of the working class. This hegemony was built around challenging the social exclusion and exploitation experienced by various segments of subordinate classes. Struggles to establish this hegemony had led to more inclusiveness in civil society and considerable progressive changes in the social relations. Yet, despite the general improvement in capabilities and experience of social mobility, many segments of Kerala's society, such as fisher folks, tribal and Dalit people as well as rural and urban poor in particular, continue to experience relatively high levels of marginalization and social exclusion (Kurien 1995).

With growth-oriented development serving the interests of the middle classes with considerable consuming power, these marginalized sections of society are left unable to participate in the market. Aside from their exclusion, they are also often left to bear the consequences of the development priorities practiced as part of this compromise, including various forms of primitive accumulation or accumulation by dispossession. These consequences often take the form of forced takeover of land for large development and infrastructure projects leading to loss of livelihood, or falling sick because of exposure to toxic pollutants flowing in water bodies, or having to bear the stench from urban waste disposal sites located near rural residential areas.

However, unlike in the 1970s when political parties, especially CPM, took the lead in taking up such issues, more recently the left parties and CPM have been ambiguous at best, often refusing to champion the cause of the marginalized because of their commitment to the development compromise. With the political establishment and the political society committed to aiding private capital investment for economic growth, the burden of opposing its deleterious effects has often fallen on the people, who have built alternative struggles with the help of civil society organizations with a counter-hegemonic thrust. Drawing on the case of the Plachimada movement, I will argue that such forms of people's struggles are the latest efforts to expand civil society and make it more inclusive. This dynamic has resulted in a complex pattern of interaction between the political society, comprising of the major political parties and their affiliate organizations, and civil society in Kerala.

Coca Cola in Plachimada and the Plachimada Movement

In 1999, after an invitation from the Kerala government led by Left Democratic Front (LDF), the Hindustan Coca Cola Beverages Private Limited (HCCB) – the Indian subsidiary of Coca Cola – decided to set up a manufacturing facility in Plachimada, a primarily agrarian region in the eastern part of Palakkad district. As part of the push towards industrialization, the government committed itself to providing the required infrastructure for the facility. As a response to the criticism that India's myriad and often cumbersome licensing procedures for industrial activity were stalling India's economic growth, the government had initiated a new single window licensing system called the "Green Channel." HCCB was provided the required license to operate through this system.

HCCB bought 34.64 acres of land primarily used for agriculture in Plachimada. In March 2000, HCCB started operations after the local governing body of Perumatty Panchayat[8]granted the required license to operate. Initially, the local agricultural workers were hopeful of finding opportunities to work in the newly established manufacturing plant. The chance to work in a factory was considered an improvement over farm labor. However, they soon found out that after skilled jobs went to workers hired from elsewhere in Palakkad, only a few "casual"[9]employment opportunities were available to them.

Local communities started experiencing two related problems not long after the factory started operating – scarcity of ground water in wells that they drew water from; and later on, ground water pollution, including hardness of water as well as the presence of high levels of cadmium and lead. According to a report, "continuous heavy withdrawal of ground water" had adversely

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[8] Panchayat is the local governing body; the public health authority of Palakkad district granted license on the condition that the plant will install an appropriate waste disposal mechanism; the Panchayat had also allowed HCCB to operate a 280 Hp electric pump to extract water from the ground. Local people were suspicious that these stipulations were flouted and the HCCB extracted more ground water than was allowed under the licensing agreement. HCCB denied this.
[9] A euphemism for unskilled informal labor.

affected the water table[10]. Scarcity of potable water led many of them to a difficult choice between work and looking for water. Several respondents reported having to trek for miles to fetch clean water. Children, in order to support their parents' efforts to fetch water, often missed out on classes. Workers were losing out on agricultural work as a result of farming being affected by shortage of water. Local people were agitated that the factory that used up a large amount of ground water was allowed to operate even as they were experiencing severe water shortage.

According to newspaper reports from a month after the factory started operating, HCCB had used the services of contractors to dispose off the sludge generated from the factory[11]. Some of these contractors approached local farmers and convinced them that the factory waste could be used in their farms in place of fertilizers. Factory waste, in large quantities, thus found its way into farmlands and open fields. Laborers who worked in these farms complained of various types of and skin rashes including skin deformities around ankles and dizziness after being exposed to the stench emanating from the sludge.

Studies suggested that the sludge, a concoction of chemicals including high levels of cadmium and lead, may have seeped into ground water. A report based on a study conducted pointed out that the waste spread through irrigations canals over a large area causing air, water and soil contamination. The water drawn from local wells had high salinity and hardness, indicating the presence of calcium salts[12]. The foul smelling sludge deposited in farms often caused stomach churning, vomiting and diarrhea among residents, particularly pregnant women, older people and children. The people of Plachimada responded to these experiences by organizing sporadic protests throughout 2001, by organizing marches to the local police station, protest demonstrations in front of the HCCB factory. Mobilization Against Marginalization of Tribal People: Context to the Plachimada Movement

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[10] A report based on a study conducted by an organization named Indian National Trust for Art and Cultural Heritage (INTACH).

[11] Based on an archive of newspaper reports put together by Haritha Development Association (HDA), an environmentalist development organization, that was part of the movement.

[12] INTACH report.

There were two factors that led to the emergence of the movement to oppose the working of the HCCB plant in Plachimada. The immediate factor was the pollution and depletion of ground water and the resultant miseries that the local population had to endure. The impetus for this popular response to the perceived injustices perpetrated by the operation of the factory came from decades of mobilization of Adivasi and Dalit people in the "tribal belt" of Kerala against caste-based forms of oppression, social marginalization and exclusion from full participation in the public sphere.

Several caste and religion based reform movements throughout the 20th century had put an end to several heinous casteist practices such as untouchability that were prevalent in Kerala even in the first half of the twentieth century. These reform movements along with the model of development practiced in Kerala had provided social mobility to several "lower" caste groups during the course of the century. Several scholars have pointed out that despite the egalitarian impulse in the public sphere and the resultant advancements in human development, the Dalit and Adivasi communities in Kerala have largely remained poor. While the "mainstream" Kerala made rapid strides human development indicators relating to health such as nutritional intake, infant mortality rates etc., the "tribal belt" of Kerala, a region close to the eastern highlands on the border with Tamil Nadu, has continued to report relatively higher levels of undernourishment and poverty-related ill-health. Several rights organizations, such as the People's Union for Civil Liberties (PUCL), have been actively working in this region to improve the conditions in the tribal communities.

Field research revealed a number of factors that contribute to the marginalization of tribal people in Palakkad. In terms of social relations, the tribal and Dalit population bear the stigma of being considered lower caste people. Vast majority of them are landless agricultural laborers or working as odd jobsmen in the informal sector. While caste-based discrimination is officially outlawed, informal, yet contested, ways of maintaining caste hierarchy persist. A respondent mentioned two instances of casteist discrimination bordering on the outlawed practice of untouchability to demonstrate how caste informs everyday social relations in this region.

In one instance, some Dalit and tribal youth who went fishing in a pond located in a higher caste locality were physically attacked. In the second instance, it was discovered that a small coffee shop operating in the region refused to serve lower caste people in cups and other utensils that the other caste people used. Instead, the coffee shop had kept aside utensils for use exclusively by lower caste clientele. Besides these incidents, respondents also spoke about frequent attacks on tribal folks by higher caste people. In rare instances of inter-caste marriages involving members of tribal communities, the couple has had to face severe sanctions from the more powerful higher caste groups.

Aside from social marginalization and lack of economic resources, tribal communities are also often at the receiving end of political power. Local activists and tribal community members, during interviews, accused the police, the most visible form of state power in this region, of discriminating against tribal and Dalit communities. They reported that the police often refuse to register cases and investigate into incidents of violent attack on tribal people, while being quick to harass them. Despite the state implementing several welfare measures for tribal and Dalit people, they point out that the benefits do not often reach them because of the corrupt bureaucracy.

Organizations such as PUCL have worked in this region largely to improve the social condition of the tribal people by addressing the factors that marginalize them. These organizations attempt to generate awareness among tribal people of their rights, advocate for them, litigating to uphold the rights of tribal people and seek accountability from the state. Besides the activities of such organizations, an overall environment of mobilization among tribal people in Kerala demanding the state government to address their landlessness and marginalization provided buoyancy in the initial days of the Plachimada movement.

An organization named *Adivasi Gothra Maha Sabha*, led by C.K. Janu, a woman tribal leader who had emerged as a leader of tribal people through her struggle to secure land rights, conducted a protest march across the state in 2001 culminating in sit-in protests in front of the seat of the government in Thiruvananthapuram, Kerala's capital. The march sought to bring

public attention to the land alienation experienced by tribal people in Kerala, besides their overall experience of marginalization. This movement inspired tribal and Dalit people across Kerala. Tribal communities were mobilized in support of this movement in the "tribal belt" of Palakkad, of which Plachimada is part. Such mobilization also provided impetus to bring to the fore long-standing experiences of oppression of tribal people and emphasized human rights and restoring land to tribal people as key to addressing their history of oppression.

Tribal youths in Plachimada and nearby villages had responded to these state-level events by actively mobilizing their support for such efforts. Forms of mobilization such as protest demonstrations, mobilizing support for those who were physically and verbally attacked and marches to police stations, when the police were reluctant to register cases and investigate into instances of violent attack, had increased during the last years of the twentieth century. It is in this context that the HCCB plant started its operations in Plachimada.

The Plachimada Movement

Chronologically, the Plachimada movement went through three loosely defined phases, the third of which is currently ongoing: the initial phase of sporadic protests congealing into an organized movement; a second phase when civil society activists in Kerala extended active support to this movement; an ongoing third phase after the closure of the HCCB plant when the main focus shifted to extracting compensation from HCCB for the losses suffered by the community, a yet unrealized demand.

As protests started to emerge in 2001, local political leaders attempted to mediate negotiations between the protestors and the HCCB management to find a settlement to the problem. Following the negotiations, HCCB agreed to provide a source of clean water, an agreement that according to the activists HCCB failed to honor[13]. HCCB also agreed to employ some local women as "casual laborers" in the factory. As popular frustration with the persistent lack of potable water grew, independent groups conducted studies on samples of water collected from

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[13] HDA archive of newspaper reports

Plachimada. These studies revealed hardness of water, high levels of total dissolved solids (TDS) and salinity[14]. Such findings, based on scientific studies, further emboldened the activists.

Three organizations, whose activities were largely focused on addressing the inequalities that the local tribal people experienced, were at the helm in the launching the movement – *Adivasi Samrakshana Samithi* [15], People's Union for Civil Liberties (PUCL) – a human rights organization that is active nation-wide, and Haritha Development Association – an environmentalist and social justice organization. In April 2002, the leadership of these organizations served a notice on HCCB that if the outstanding issues were not resolved they would launch an indefinite struggle against the factory.

Following this, on April 22, 2002, C.K. Janu inaugurated the Anti-Coca Cola movement in a meeting attended by over 2000 people. The Anti-Cola Struggle Committee was formed to coordinate protest activities. Two demands that were spelled out in this meeting: to close down HCCB factory; and secure compensation for the losses the local residents suffered because of ground water pollution and depletion. The meeting also decided to follow the method of Satyagraha, a non-violent form of struggle based on adherence to civil disobedience popularized by Gandhi. The launching of the movement was followed by a series of lawsuits, both by HCCB – against the leadership of the movement – and the movement, in retaliation.

The Initial Phase: In the initial phase, which lasted about 50 days after the struggle the struggle was launched, the movement primarily focused on mobilizing in and around Plachimada and in Palakkad district through campaigns, marches, demonstrations, pamphleteering and public debates. They erected a make shift tent, that acted as a struggle arena, across the road from the gate of the family. This arena was the site of sit-in demonstrations, public meetings, and debates that went on a regular basis. The main effort was to increase the visibility of the movement. The movement gained large-scale support within Palakkad and this also helped raise the necessary resources for the movement.

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[14] INTACH report

[15] Translates as Committee for Protection of Tribal People.

The machinery of the state, using police force, was severe in clamping down on the movement. Respondents reported that the state attempted to quell the movement by using police officers to threaten activists into submission, including filing various charges against those in the leadership of the movement, and keeping them under arrest without charges. Besides the state government, the local government, or the Panchayat, of Perumatty, a cluster of villages that Plachimada is part of, also remained opposed to the movement.

Two related factors, aside from the staunch opposition of the state, became evident in the first phase: the established political parties opposed the movement; and labor unions, especially the union of workers in the HCCB factory sided with its management in opposing the movement. Overall, the thrust of the opposition to the movement was based on the claim of its "anti-developmentalism." The media, barring some local newspapers with circulation in and around Palakkad, largely ignored the movement. At the same time, the consumption of water continued unabated at the factory. Clearly, the Plachimada movement, in order to survive, had to fight not only the HCCB plant, but also the state, the political parties, labor unions and the hegemonic structure that supported the programmatic commitment to developmentalism even if segments of Kerala's population had to pay a price for it.

Of the two alliances of political parties in Kerala, the center-right United Democratic Front (UDF), led by the Indian National Congress (INC), was by now ruling the state, having defeated the Left Democratic Front (LDF) led by CPM in the elections on the plank of development. At the national level, the INC has long championed neoliberal economic reforms. The UDF, with a core constituency of upper caste Hindus and the richer sections of Kerala's Christian and Muslim population, deemed any opposition to economic growth "anti-development". CPM, on the other hand, opposed the movement because the government that it had led was instrumental in starting the HCCB factory in Plachimada. As a result, the political parties refused to participate when the struggle committee invited all political parties and civil society organizations to a meeting month after the movement was launched, while the support of a number of local civil society organizations became vital for the survival of the movement.

Jobs versus survival of marginal communities became the theme of a standoff between the labor union of HCCB and the movement. As the movement progressed the HCCB workers, most of who were not residents of Plachimada, initiated a counter-offensive by forming themselves into Labor Protection Committee (LPC). The LPC managed to enlist the support of the political parties because employees of the HCCB factory included sympathizers and members of the various political parties. The LPC regularly held public meetings to counter the claims of the movement.

In early June 2002, an organization of artists based in a village nearby organized a public debate, in which the struggle committee represented the movement and various civil society organizations in Palakkad attended, on the problem in Plachimada. The movement leadership explained the level of social, environmental, and cultural impacts of the HCCB factory. They emphasized that multi-national corporations (MNCs) must not be allowed to exploit the commons, the very basis of the right to survival of communities. In an attempt to be inclusive, the leadership called for HCCB to compensate for the losses suffered by not only the local communities, but the workers as well.

In response to the debate, the LPC organized a public meeting where representatives of political parties openly declared their support to the workers and their opposition to the movement. The left parties were insistent that they were against "globalization" but at the same time, they reiterated their commitment to development because it brought jobs. They also vouched that the factory in no way contributed to the pollution of ground water.

The Second Phase: The movement entered a second phase in early June 2002. In the first phase, fierce opposition tied down the movement, and its energies were spent in thwarting the growing violence against it, especially from the police, and avoiding lawsuits. At the same time, support from civil society organizations was beginning to grow.

On June 7, 2002, the Struggle Committee organized a protest march to the Panchayat. The effort towards decentralization of governance in Kerala had bestowed powers on local governing

bodies, such as the Panchayats, to direct development within its boundaries. The activists were hopeful that their efforts would spur local Panchayat officials, who had earlier accepted the HCCB factory in the name of development, into action to hold the HCCB factory accountable for depletion and pollution of groundwater. The activists thought that corruption in the Panchayat, like in the other organs of the state, was standing in the way of their justice. The women in the protest march carried with them brooms, and upon reaching the Panchayat's office, threw the brooms at the door, symbolically cleaning up what they perceived as a corrupt institution.

In preparation for this protest event, the movement leadership had reached out to its network among civil society activists from various parts of Kerala. For the first time since the launching of the struggle, a number of activists, associated with various social movements in Kerala, attended the protests and expressed solidarity to the movement. The buoyed local activists resorted to heavy sloganeering and a large posse of police personnel present reacted by charging at the crowd with batons. Eventually, about 200 activists, including some of the visiting civil society activists as well as local tribal men and women, were arrested and removed to the local police station. The media covered extensively the events, especially the arrest of some renowned activists, and the perceived highhandedness of the police force leading to widespread condemnation of the latter.

Following this incident, the civil society activists committed to the cause of the struggle by forming a Solidarity Committee, which was to become an active part of directing the movement thenceforth in coordination with the Struggle Committee. A division of labor – the Struggle Committee was charged with running the day to day activities of the movement in Plachimada, and the Solidarity Committee would operate as a vehicle for popularizing the movement, as well as providing legal and other resources – was agreed upon. The Solidarity Committee, in the initial days, used its networks to explore the possibility of several counter-hegemonic movements working together. As a result, the media started reporting the movement extensively giving it the much-needed visibility in Kerala.

Two trends provided clear signals of the public opinion shifting in favor of the movement: several organizations of poor and marginalized people started extending support to the movement; and secondly, many youth groups in Kerala started undertaking campaigns against Coca Cola in solidarity with the Plachimada movement[16]. Civil society organizations from all fourteen districts in Kerala mobilized anti-Cola programs.

Pursuant to the sudden spurt of movement activity on a broader, statewide, scale, the political parties that were able to maintain an ambivalent, yet oppositional relationship to the movement, were forced to revisit their position. In a significant move, in November 2002, V.S. Achuthanandan of CPM, the leader of the opposition in Kerala's legislative assembly, and a popular politician known for his active advocacy of social justice struggles, declared his support for the Plachimada movement. With Achuthanandan's vocal support for the movement marked a shift in the movement's struggle for hegemony – challenge posed by the socially excluded and marginalized people to the discourse of developmentalism was now firmly placed in the public sphere in Kerala. Along with it, majority of the political parties shifted their position and started either supporting the movement or toned down their opposition to it. However, with the active support of the left political parties, now out of power in the state government, the struggle in Plachimada came to be seen as a single-issue movement – enforce the closure of the HCCB plant.

With the groundswell of support, the state's approach, while not entirely in support of the movement yet, considerably softened. Incidents of police atrocities on the activists became fewer. A Committee on Environmental Affairs was appointed by the Legislative Assembly of Kerala to assess the ground water in Kerala. Even though this committee did not consult the local population in order to understand the extent of the impact of pollution, the committee concluded that use of 600 Kiloliters of water every day by HCCB factory amounted to overexploitation of ground water, which may contribute to lowering of water table and drought conditions.

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[16] For instance, in November 2002, as an expression of solidarity with the Plachimada movement, a youth organization destroyed Coca Cola bottles after capturing a warehouse in Kozhikode.

Soon after, the Panchayat changed its position and started to support the movement. The Panchayat's support became vital for the movement's progress. By the end of March 2003, HCCB's license to operate the plant, provided by the Panchayat, had come up for renewal. By now, most political parties took the stance of not opposing the movement openly, while some others were vocal in support. As a result, the Panchayat took the decision not to renew the license.

The active support of the National Alliance for People's Movements (NAPM), a federation of various ongoing social movements in India, proved vital for the further growth of this movement. With the NAPM's support, the Plachimada movement was incorporated into an argument against the commodification of natural resources and commons in the interest of neoliberal capitalism on a global scale. According to a leader of NAPM interviewed, "the new imperialist policies of the government have helped the privatization of natural resources and aided the exploitation of these for the benefit of monopoly capitalists." They called for boycott of transnational corporations.

With the support of the NAPM, the Plachimada movement participated in the World Social Forum (WSF) meeting organized in Mumbai, India, in 2004. The Plachimada movement, at the WSF, gained national and global attention as "a fight of the most marginalized people against one of the largest transnational corporations in the world"[17]. Following the WSF, in January 2004, the movement organized a "World Water Conference" in Plachimada. Several activists from various countries, who were in India for the WSF meeting, visited Plachimada to partake in this conference. The conference resolved that being a common resource, the right to manage water should remain with local communities and that private corporations must not be allowed to exploit it at will.

This was the zenith of the local mobilization in Plachimada. The movement organizers had employed a strategy of mobilizing people in Plachimada and lobbying with the government to support its cause. Support from civil society organizations, operating locally, state-wide, nationally, and the participation in WSF – all helped the movement legitimize its claims. As a

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[17] Stated in an interview by a renowned civil society leader in Kerala

result, the Kerala government declared Perumatty Panchayat area, of which Plachimada is part, as an area experiencing over-exploitation of water. This declaration imposed strict limits on the usage of water in this area. Soon after, the HCCB factory was shut down.

Since the shutdown of the plant, in the third phase, the movement leadership has been fighting legal suits in India in order to extract compensation from HCCB for the losses suffered by the people of Plachimada. While the original tent that acted as the struggle arena in front of the HCCB factory still remains in Plachimada, activists come together only to commemorate anniversaries of the movement and when there is a significant development in the court cases or a governmental initiative that has bearing on the issue.

A tribunal appointed by the Kerala government to assess the damage in Plachimada found that local communities suffered considerable losses and recommended that they be compensated. In a meeting organized in 2012, activists discussed the possibility of organizing a protest in front of the seat of government in Thiruvananthapuram, the capital of Kerala, to push for compensation. Although the meeting discussed the possibility of organizing joint struggles along with social movements in Kerala addressing similar issues, the meeting adjourned without a plan of action.

Hegemony and the Politics of Civil Society in Plachimada

An aspect of hegemony is the normalization and routinization of patterns and practices of domination of social forces that form a historic bloc. To be sure, in Gramscian thought, this hegemony or indirect domination is never absolute (Gramsci 2010). It is always relative, dynamic and, therefore, open to transformation. Hegemony operates not only through manifest social structures, but also indirectly through forms of consciousness, cultural practices, etc. A key dimension of hegemony operating in struggles for social transformation is the way it imposes limits on the possible. I argue that the invisible structures of hegemony, often working through unreflected upon assumptions about social reality, may work even in counterhegemonic efforts thereby limiting the possible. The key question is: what were the possibilities and limits of civil society's activities in Plachimada? An examination of the politics of civil society in

Plachimada needs to focus on the hegemonic historic bloc and the counter hegemonic vision and strategies adopted by the movement.

In the initial stage, the struggle in Plachimada moved seamlessly from tribal people's struggle to fight their conditions of marginality into a movement against a HCCB factory that was seen as the latest in the chain of factors that produce their marginality. As the local protests began, the energy garnered by channeling the marginalized tribal and Dalit people's struggle for security and dignity became the driving force of a fight against a big transnational corporation.

Along the way, however, the discourse about the movement shifted from emphasis on the ongoing marginality of tribal people and the impacts of neoliberal development choices to a narrowly defined moral and technical problem related to water depletion, pollution and conservation. The movement won a decisive victory from the vantage point of the latter perspective. To be sure, the activists celebrated their victory as one of a marginalized people against a key player in the global economy.

The movement contributed significantly to civil society activism in Kerala. However, several local activists went back to conditions that had not changed much.

> "We understand that the fight against our conditions is a continuous one. However, there was a feeling that while we managed to close the factory, our insecurities as a community continue. We have addressed one part of the problem, but the major part remains" – A tribal activist who was in leadership of the struggle from the start said in an interview.

Claims making and Definition of the Movement: The Plachimada movement, in its course, went through a complex process of defining its objectives from organizing a broad based struggle against tribal oppression, of which the water problem was to be a part, to specifically and narrowly focusing on the water problem and enforcing the closure of the HCCB factory. The initial stage leading up to the formal launching of the movement was characterized by discussions about what the movement must confront. Local tribal organizations insisted that the

opposition to HCCB's appropriation of water must be addressed in the overall context of social exclusion and oppression of tribal people. Recounting the events leading up to the start of the movement, an interviewee 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 *Adivasi Samrakshana Samithi* (ASS) decided to take up the case. We started a march of about 500 people from the front gate of the Cola plant. We saw the working of the factory and appropriation of water as a form of threat to our existence, the worst forms of which are seen in direct attack by police and others" – Leader of a local association in Plachimada, Kerala.

Addressing the social condition of tribal people in Plachimada required, according to these activists, envisioning a broad based struggle against the oppressive social order. During the initial phase two interlinked dimensions of the problem were identified: caste based oppression and exploitation of common resources by a transnational corporation made possible by neoliberal development. Interviewees identified the problems as interrelated.

They pointed out, for instance, that a prominent political leader in the region was among the many landowners who were largely from higher castes benefited by selling water out of their land to the HCCB plant. Efforts were made to understand which local social forces stood to benefit from "globalization" or neoliberal development. The activists understood the opposition of the state and political society to the movement as emerging from the movement becoming a social constraint to profit-seeking investment. However, over time and in the course of the movement's complex processes of development through interaction with the political society, such discussions about the nature of the problem they confronted became fewer. The movement came to focus on its stated aim of enforcing the closure of the HCCB factory.

Why was it, then, that as the protests grew, the objectives were defined as enforcing the closure of the HCCB factory and extracting compensation? A local activist, who was involved in the decision making process at that stage, explained:

> "The Coca Cola related water problem was becoming a serious problem in the region and we wanted to put an immediate stop to it. However, we knew that merely shutting down the factory would not change anything. We had to keep addressing the larger problems."

As a result, the focus on the immediate and emergent problem precluded the possibility of identifying and challenging the ongoing structural factors that cause them.

With the organizing of the World Water Conference, the movement leadership largely focused on presenting globalization as the problem and the situation in Plachimada as emerging from the ills of globalization. A civil society respondent pointed out:

> "Initially the movement was started as one to address a local problem of adivasis. Media and civil society did play a role in translating this into a bigger problem of water rights, and globalization itself. Civil society helped raise this as a global issue. The very presence of leaders such as Medha Patkar and Vandana Shiva gave it a lot of mileage."

In Plachimada, globalization was seen as external market actors, especially the transnational corporations, seeking to exploit India's resources. With such shift, state and political society were no more considered enablers of the social processes that are captured in the umbrella term globalization. Instead, state and political society were to be won over in order to fight globalization. A leader summed this up:

> "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 course of time, we managed to get the state to our side in many occasions."

This optimistic view, while acknowledging the state's propensity to advance the interests of the market forces, however, emphasized that people's mobilization can force the state to uphold community rights. While the state may be potential a site of struggle and contention, the political society – including the parties and their feeder organizations – in general, are often defenders of the hegemonic arrangement. As mentioned above, the political society was staunchly opposed to the movement, portrayed anti-development, from the start. The state, from the outset, was concerned that allowing anti-developmentalist movement to continue against a global giant like Coca Cola would be detrimental for the investment climate in the state.

However, after the movement garnered much attention with civil society involvement, leaders belonging to various political parties extended support in their individual capacity and became actively involved. Many of them were from the left parties and had a commitment to social justice issues in general. From this stage onwards, the movement relied on their connections to the state leadership to advance its causes. The strategy was to mobilize forces in front of the factory, and at times organize protest demonstrations in various governmental headquarters, and negotiate with the state. It required a large-scale mobilizing and media effort all over Kerala to bring at least a large section of the political parties to support the movement.

The movement, in negotiating with the state, had to clearly define its demands. In the process, however, the issue became more narrowly defined at various stages as a problem of "globalization", to appeal to the left parties; as "water problem" to invoke the rights of communities over profit-seeking corporations. In all these definitions, the problem was assumed to be "external" to the organic processes ongoing within communities. For instance, globalization was seen as an external imposition on society against the society's interests.

The fact that processes of globalization are realized in particular spaces through the active agency of classes or class fractions that benefit from these processes was not captured in the goals or the discursive praxis of the movement. As a result the larger problems of tribal marginalization that caused the specific issue were left unaddressed. On the whole, contingencies that emerged as the movement developed led to emphasizing instrumentalities as opposed to a

protracted struggle against the oppression produced within the hegemonic social order. An intellectual who had participated in the Plachimada struggle at various phases remarked cryptically: "there is not much of a civil society in Kerala. What we have is a dominant political society."

To be sure, the Plachimada movement became a landmark movement for the level of success it had. It inspired several social movements in Kerala challenging the development compromise. Yet, the Plachimada movement remarkably demonstrated the way hegemony operates in tilting the balance of power from civil society to the political society. It is the unequal relationship with the political society that explains how hegemony operated within this counter hegemonic movement thereby imposing limits on the possible.

Conclusion

Kerala's civil society has developed and expanded through several counter hegemonic movements. Social movements of a century ago opposed a historic bloc built around social structures based on caste and contributed to progressive social change. More recently, several labor and peasant movements furthered the progressive nature of social change in Kerala. Such changes have led to the establishment of a new historic bloc revealed in the concept of development compromise that is largely supported by the kind of corporatist political society prevalent in Kerala. The situation in Plachimada emerged out of the growth imperative of global capitalism finding common grounds with the needs of the locally hegemonic bloc.

A dynamic view of counter-hegemonic movements will have to account not only for the actions of the movements' activists but also that of the historic bloc that the movement seeks to challenge. Hegemonic historic blocs and their ruling agents attempt to legitimize their power on an ongoing basis, especially in the context of the state and political society augmenting capitalist processes of surplus value accumulation. Counter hegemonic civil society organizations pose challenges to the legitimization process. Such counter hegemonic efforts from civil society may win some important victories in this process. While the politics of civil society emerges from disenchantment with established forms of politics, in the course of the development of such

politics, civil society has to engage in a hegemonic struggle with the political society. In Plachimada, this dynamic between the political society and civil society determined the limits of the possible.

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