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FORUM ARTICLE

An 'Expanded' Class Perspective: Bringing capitalism down to earth in the changing political lives of Adivasi workers in Kerala

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Abstract

Following the police raid on the 'Muthanga' land occupation by Adivasi ('indigenous') activists in Kerala, India, in February 2003, intense public debate erupted about the fate of Adivasis in this 'model' development state. Most commentators saw the land occupation either as the fight-back of Adivasis against their age-old colonization or the work of 'external' agitators. Capitalist restructuring and 'globalization' was generally seen as simply the latest chapter in the suffering of these Adivasis. Little focused attention was paid to the recent class trajectory of their lives under changing capitalist relations, the exact social processes under which they were having to make a living, and what had only recently—and still largely ambiguously—made them ready to identify themselves politically as 'Adivasi'. Demonstrating the usefulness of ethnographic curiosity driven by an 'expanded' class analysis, as elaborated in Marxian anthropology, this article provides an alternative to the liberal-culturalist explanation of indigenism in Kerala. It argues instead that contemporary class processes—as experienced close to the skin by the people who decided to participate in the Muthanga struggle—were what shaped their decision to embrace indigenism.

Introduction

What could have led a group of impoverished agricultural labourers in the hilly Wayanad region of Kerala, who generally had only the vaguest idea of 'being Adivasi', to embrace the politics of the Adivasi Gothra Maha Sabha, Kerala's new 'indigenous' movement? This article attempts to answer this question through anthropological engagement with Marxian class analysis in the tradition of Eric Wolf—a somewhat unusual move as class analysis in the anthropology of

India has generally been confined to the study of political discourses or the practice of social distinctions among what are considered to be 'modern' sections of the proletariat. Jonathan Parry's studies among workers of the Bhilai Steel Plant are among the best examples of such anthropological class analysis in India, but he has not paid much attention to theorizing class as a more widely applicable analytical tool. The tendency overall has been in the opposite direction, further restricting a class perspective. An example is to be found in the work of Dipesh Chakrabarty who claims that the adherence by factory workers to pre-capitalist loyalties of caste, religion, and region, invalidates Marxist class analysis even in these settings.[1] Such claims have been contested by those who argue that 'class does matter' in such contexts, not as a 'master identity' but as a 'political entity that can be made and remade depending on the contingency of immediate social and political circumstances'.[2] In such challenges, class, however, is still treated only as a political entity. It is not used in the way that Eric Wolf did, as a way to study the structured contingencies of uneven development and the creation of the so-called traditional and the modern in a single, if fragmentary, historical process 'moving simultaneously on the level of the encompassing system and on the micro level'.[3] Indeed, for a Marxian anthropologist, class is not just class 'for itself'. It is first and foremost a notion calling attention to the logic of capital as the 'real that lurks in the background'—of studying social relations *within capitalism*.[4] This also distinguishes Marxian class analysis from studies of class dynamics in India which, by using class merely as a political phenomenon or sociological categorization, can talk of class without any reference to capitalism.

This article is hence an attempt to bring what, following Don Kalb,[5] may be called an 'expanded' Marxian notion of class to bear on questions of political identification among Adivasi workers in Kerala. It is based on 12 months of fieldwork in Kerala, particularly among a

[1] Chakrabarty, Dipesh. (1989). *Rethinking working class history: Bengal 1890–1940*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.

[2] Basu, Subho. (2004). *Does class matter? Colonial capital and workers' resistance in Bengal, 1890–1937*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, p. 283.

[3] Wolf, Eric. (1982). *Europe and the people without history*. Berkeley: University of California Press, p. 23.

[4] Smith, Neil. [1984] (2010). *Uneven development: Nature, capital and the production of space*. London: Verso.

[5] Kalb, Don. (1997). 'Introduction' in *Expanding class: Power and everyday politics in industrial communities, the Netherlands, 1850–1950*. Durham: Duke University Press.

residential 'colony'[6] of Adivasi workers, mainly of the Paniya tribal caste,[7] in Wayanad in 2006–2007. Trends observed at the time became all the more visible during a short return visit in 2009. The colony in question, which I call 'Kottamurade', is part of what (at least until recently) was a booming, cash-cropping village where farmers—mostly Christian immigrants from southern Kerala—were doing very well. Almost none of the inhabitants of Kottamurade colony owned any land, however, and their occupation was—until recently—mostly that of paddy cultivation for local landowners. In the past, the political struggles of this community had been primarily about freeing themselves from bondage and increasing their wages. From interviews I discovered that, in the course of the 1990s, this had changed and instead the desire to own a piece of land had become a central preoccupation. With this shift also came a gradual identification with 'Adivasiness'—though this identification was still developing and was far from complete when I spoke to people there in 2006/2007. Some people were still sceptical of what it meant to be 'Adivasi', telling me, for instance, 'Adivasi? That's something the government calls us. We are just Paniya.' Others, however—especially those who had been at the forefront of organizing the colony for political action—had become enthusiastic about their 'Adivasi' identity. At the time of my fieldwork, discussions in the colony would often revolve around the wisdom—or foolishness—of the decision of people at Kottamurade in 2003 to take up all they owned and join the Adivasi Gothra Maha Sabha, a new Adivasi movement in Kerala, in order to occupy land in the nearby Muthanga nature reserve. The fact that the occupiers were brutally evicted by the police casts a shadow over the memory of that decision but many people continued to voice a desire for land and were happy to have identified themselves as 'Adivasi'.

[6] These rural ghettoes are the outcome of the policy of resettling Adivasis as a group in government colonies—their 'colonization', as C. K. Janu calls it. See Janu, C K. (2011). 'We need to build huts all over Kerala, again and again' in K. Satyanarayana and Susie Tharu (eds), *No alphabet in sight*. London: Penguin Books, pp. 431–451 (p. 432).

[7] I follow Jan Breman in using the notion of 'tribal caste' to describe this category of people, who are legally and historically associated with the notion of the 'tribe' but in fact are part of the caste system as it functions in Kerala today. The notion also fits with how some of my informants referred to themselves at times as a 'ST [Scheduled Tribe] *jati*'. For the most elaborate (rather encyclopedic) ethnography of 'the Paniya' to date see Aiyappan, A. (1992). *The Paniyas—an ex-slave tribe of South India*. Calcutta: Institute of Social Research and Anthropology.

Using an expanded, theoretical notion of class to study the shift in political identification towards embracing 'Adivasi' identity does not mean forsaking an interest in how people themselves interpreted this shift. It does, however, mean placing what people told me about the importance—or not—of being 'Adivasi' in the context of their everyday and working lives, and in the context of available public discourse, hence assuming as a researcher a degree of explanatory power beyond the things people told me. The most explicit of the people I spoke to at Kottamurade were often also those in whose arguments I heard strong, even literal, echoes of the way in which Adivasi identity was being discussed in the media—and of how indigenous activism is often debated in academia. Arguments would veer between, or often combine, two extremes. On the one hand, there was the idea that Adivasi identity was simply a primordial given as, in the absence of artificial interferences such as the Naxal attempt to fit these people into a 'class' framework, it would naturally be people's primary identification, a reference to their recent pre-modern past. It was interesting, however, to hear the taken-for-granted idea that this Adivasi past was a better, happier one implicitly contested by older generations who in fact associated this past with seeing their parents traded from one *jenmi* (landlord) to another during the annual festival of Valliyoorkavu. On the other hand, there was an idea[8] that Adivasi identity had suddenly become so popular as a result of flows of money and ideas coming from NGOs working in the area. To my question of why the leader of the Adivasi Gothra Maha Sabha would include all Scheduled Tribe groups in the notion of 'Adivasiness' in a place where local Paniyas felt they had nothing in common with 'higher-caste' Scheduled Tribes like the Kurichia, a Paniya woman told me: 'She talks like that because she's a professional.' Between the natural and the professional, culture and calculation—or what I have earlier called the 'liberal culturalism'[9] found in much of the field of indigenous

[8] The role of 'travelling models' (see Tsing, Anna. (2007). 'Indigenous voice' in Marisol de la Cadena and Orin Start (eds), *Indigenous experience today*. Oxford: Berg), of indigenism, and the agency of NGOs is often given major importance in academic studies as well, be it in a celebratory light (e.g. Niezen, Ronald. (2003). *The origins of indigenism*. Berkeley: University of California Press) or in a more critical evaluation (e.g. Shah, Alpa. (2010). *In the shadows of the state: Indigenous politics, environmentalistm, and insurgency in Jharkhand, India*. Durham: Duke University Press).

[9] Steur, Luisa. (2005). '"On the correct handling of contradictions": liberal-culturalism in indigenous studies'. *Focaal—European Journal of Anthropology* 46, pp. 169–176.

studies—is what people told me about the profound changes they had experienced in the course of their lives in terms of the way they related to their neighbours, employers, and other villagers; in the tensions of everyday life and the struggle to maintain a living; and in the way they could envision the future, particularly for their children. These relational processes are what matter from a class perspective. I hence do not argue for class to be added as just another 'factor' explaining the attraction of indigenism, alongside abstract notions of 'culture' or 'self-interest'. Rather, I want to shift the perspective altogether and use the synthetic power of a Marxian notion of class[10] to refuse a disembedding of people's consciousness and interests from the everyday, conflictive reality of making a living and organizing a future within a particular evolving set of relationships.

I hence explore the rise of indigenism as a historical and relational class process, outside the framework of liberal-culturalist common sense. In so doing, I rely on a notion of class as 'rooted in the basic and never frictionless ties and interdependences between ... people as arising from their efforts to survive and maintain themselves'.[11] Here class is also a methodological notion, directing our attention beyond ideal antinomies[12] towards historical process, constituted by, as well as constitutive of, the relational inequalities and contradictions that people maintain among themselves and their environment in an evolving world system. Indeed, relational dependencies happen at multiple levels, from the intimate and personal, to the meso- and macro-level. The process through which ordinary participants of the Adivasi Gothra Maha Sabha, in this case the Paniya of Kottamurade, began to see themselves as Adivasis is best understood through a concept of class that relates the daily necessity of securing a living and the human need for orientation and meaning-making to the shifting multi-scalar regimes of production and appropriation in which such practices take place. Though studied at multiple levels, the challenge of class analysis is to remember that scales are produced and restructured in the shaping of the capitalist world system,[13] and thus require a dialectical 'inside/out' methodology to connect the local and the global in an always-evolving theoretical notion

[10] Thompson, E. P. (1965). 'Peculiarities of the English' in R. Miliband and J. Saville (eds), *The socialist register*. London: Merlin Press.

[11] Kalb, *Expanding class*, p. 2.

[12] Roseberry, William. (1994). *Anthropologies and histories: Essays in culture, history and political economy*. New Brunswick and London: Rutgers University Press, p. 30ff.

[13] Smith, *Uneven development*.

of the totality of capitalist relations.[14] This makes for a politically more interesting conception of how indigenism came about in Kerala and challenges the notion either that an international discourse of indigenism simply trickled down through predetermined national, regional, and, finally, local levels to impact on ordinary people's consciousness or, conversely, that a local indigenism arose 'from the grassroots', ontologically separate from the global. Instead, we might acknowledge how indigenist consciousness among the Paniya of Kottamurade is articulated 'within and against' local history,[15] which itself is shaped by the determinations (both pressures and limits) of global regimes of appropriation and accumulation.

Before I go on to demonstrate the relevance of such Marxian, 'expanded' class analysis to understanding the concrete case of Kottamurade's shifting political identification, I note two reasons why Kerala is such an apt place in which to use an expanded class analysis. First, Kerala is a state where it is necessary to study the subtleties of how relationships evolve through time and space in connection to a capitalist world system. Here it is more difficult to substitute such analysis with a focus on 'globalization' or 'neoliberalism' precisely because, relative to other Indian states, there is less direct relevance in Kerala of these supposedly new forms of economic imposition or governmentality. During the period under consideration in this article (the 1990s and early 2000s), the streetview in an average Kerala rurban setting was still dominated by a competition between Communist Party and Congress flags among small retailers—no giant shopping malls or advertisements for global brands (yet) dominated the scene. Although quite a lot of protest was made against Coca-Cola's factory polluting water in central Kerala, the grabbing of natural resources and land by multinational companies was still mild compared to other states, and there was not yet much physical impact on the landscape.[16] Despite neoliberal policy influence, the public

[14] Peck, Jamie. (2010). *Constructions of neoliberal reason*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

[15] Sider, Gerald. (2003). *Living Indian histories: The Lumbee and Tuscarora people in North Carolina*. Chapel Hill; London: University of North Carolina Press.

[16] As Ananthakrishnan Aiyer argues, the Coca-Cola struggle at Plachimada is therefore more usefully analysed not so much as yet another example of neoliberalism or for the impact of transnational companies but rather as one that is developing within the ongoing capitalist crisis of Indian agriculture. See Aiyer, Ananthakrishnan. (2007). 'The allure of the transnational: Notes on some aspects of the political economy of water in India'. *Cultural Anthropology* 22 (4), pp. 640–658.

rhetoric of most government bodies was still under the hegemony of the Kerala model of 'pro-poor' or 'people's' development: little open policy talk of privatization or of the overriding importance of 'growth' was (yet) tolerated. Hence the processes of the deepening of capitalist relations had to be sought at a less directly visible level. It is only through an expanded class perspective—*pace* those who argue for Kerala's exceptionalism in terms of being able to resist 'globalization' or 'neoliberalism'[17]—that more latent processes of increased commodification and market exposure can be seen to have taken place in Kerala.

A second reason why an expanded class perspective is relevant to a study of Kerala (and vice versa) is that it provides an opportunity to distinguish such a theoretical interpretation of class from an emic notion of class. Due the strength of the communist movement and its attempts to give vernacular content to universalistic notions of class, it has become a familiar part of national-popular discourse and cultural production.[18] As the Communist Party, especially the Communist Party of India (Marxist), is still one of the two major electoral blocks in Kerala, the rise of indigenism is often depicted in the media and party political debates as a shift from 'class politics' (*varga rashtriyam*) to 'identity politics' (*swathwa rashtriyam*). The more the Communist Party of India (Marxist), however, insists that the appearance of identity politics has nothing to do with existing caste hierarchies within the Party or its own complicity as a ruling party with neoliberal restructuring, but is merely feeding the Hindutva agenda of 'communalism' or is a foreign conspiracy to fragment the working class, the more those asserting 'identity politics' reject 'class politics' altogether.[19] Indeed, the critique has rightly emerged that in Kerala, under the 'political paternity of the Left', 'class analysis and the philosophical resources of a determinist Marxism have been used ... to obscure the decisive relationship between property ownership and caste'.[20] Class 'for itself' in Kerala has thus become disconnected

[17] Heller, Patrick. (2000). *The labor of development: Workers and the transformation of capitalism in Kerala, India*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press.

[18] Mannnathukkaren, Nissim. (2013). 'The rise of the national-popular and its limits: Communism and the cultural in Kerala'. *Inter-Asia Cultural Studies*, 1–25, p. 3ff.

[19] Steur, Luisa. (2011). 'Adivasis, communists and the rise of indigenism in Kerala'. *Dialectical Anthropology* 35 (1), pp. 59–69.

[20] Kapikkad, Sunny M. (2011). 'Kerala model: A Dalit critique' in Satyanarayana and Tharu (eds), *No alphabet in sight*, pp. 464–474 (p. 465).

from class formation 'in itself'—a clear case of the 'nested typologies' of class complicating 'our ability to apprehend the fluidity of class relations and experience'.[21] While those in Kerala busy attracting foreign direct investment and dealing with budget deficits continue to envision themselves as governing in the name of 'the working class', those whose poverty or vulnerability has been exacerbated by the process vehemently reject the idea of class altogether and have turned to indigenism instead. Adding to the complexity is the fact that the people who feature in this article—the Paniya of Kottamurade—are in fact among the few in Kerala for whom class is *not* a discourse of significant importance. Their shift 'from class to identity' is a political process with a small 'p': it happened not so much at the level of political party affiliation or ideology but in the way they increasingly started to see their lives as no longer characterized by living under a government that 'doesn't care enough for us poor people' and by dependence on 'people with a lot of money'. Instead they saw themselves as 'Adivasis' oppressed by 'mainstream' groups who, along with the state, 'robbed us of our autonomy'. It is clear, then, that in this context an 'emic' class analysis of the shift in political identification is an extremely confused exercise, whereas an expanded class perspective can actually deepen our understanding of it—as I will demonstrate.

Capitalism on the ground: the rise of indigenism at Kottamurade colony

Why did people in Kottamurade become inclined towards a politics of Adivasi belonging? A class perspective would situate the process, as with any social process in today's world, in the context of capitalist change. Yet doing so does not mean we need to stick to the level of abstract totality interesting only for sociological theory. There are ways of envisioning this abstract process more concretely, 'ethnographically'. In this case, by looking at the way in which aspirations of integration began to fade as the possibilities of participating in Kerala society by earning a decent income and having access to crucial reproductive support started to decline under the pressures of the current, financialized phase of global capitalism.

[21] Kasmir, Sharryn and August Carbonella. (2008). 'Dispossession and the anthropology of labor'. *Critique of Anthropology* 28(1), pp. 5–25 (p.6).

The idea of becoming a worker-citizen was not one that the residents of Kottamurade have long been able to cherish. In the wake of 1968—ignited in India by the extra-parliamentary communist 'Naxalbari revolt'—they freed themselves from bondage. At the time, many poor, mostly Christian, settlers from southern Kerala had come into Wayanad and started claiming land that had previously been under the control of temples and large landowners. This upset the feudal balance of power and allowed Paniyas, for the first time, to claim plots of land for themselves. A few of the settlers were, moreover, part of the militant Maoist periphery of the Communist Party and led attacks on particular landlords they identified as the cruellest embodiments of state-feudal power. It was as part of this Naxalite movement that many Paniyas were freed from bondage. Through strikes and in the context of a growing demand for their labour, they managed to receive gradual increases in their wages. During the Emergency period of the mid-1970s, the Naxalite movement was repressed,[22] through violence but also through the Indian central government's populist *Garibi Hatao* ('Eradicate Poverty') campaign. Particularly significant for the Paniya were the campaign's renewed promises to abolish bonded labour, to provide housing for the poor, and to set up state-run cooperatives to provide tribal employment.

For both those employed as day labourers as well as those employed in the plantation sector, the 1990s were a time of drastically decreasing demand for their labour. This was the result of the further withdrawal of capital from Kerala's agricultural sector, which could barely compete with cheaper products from elsewhere.[23] Higher wages achieved as part of the labour and land reform movements of the 1960s had already led to a decreasing demand for labour in agriculture and

[22] At present, as the indigenist momentum passes its peak, there seems to be a Naxal revival in the area: '[t]hough advocates of identity politics claimed that the strength of Adivasi movements ... indicated the irrelevance of Maoism in Kerala', there are indications that Maoism is on the rise again in the Western Ghats. See Cooper, Jaison. (2013). 'Adivasis of Kerala: citizens or cannon fodder?' in J. Devika (ed.), *Kafila* 20 November 2013.

[23] As Raj demonstrates, since many of these plantation workers are Dalits or Adivasis, forms of caste discrimination that had been kept at bay in the boom period of the plantation belt now came back to haunt these workers, exacerbating their economic distress. Raj, Jayaseelan. (2013). 'Alienated enclaves: Economic crisis and neo-bondage in a South Indian plantation belt'. *Forum for Development Studies* 40(3), pp. 465–490.

the agro-processing industries.[24] Yet during the 1970s and 1980s, government mediation, attempts at employment provision, and a host of redistributive and social welfare policies—notably a government-subsidized pension scheme for agricultural labourers—had managed to keep alive the idea of progress for workers, especially peripheral workers like those at Kottamurade to whom these benefits had only become available during the 1970s. These were arguably merely 'poor-relief' programmes,[25] but they nevertheless had a significant impact on lifting rural households out of poverty. By the 1990s, however, employment provision and welfare schemes were grinding to a halt through underfunding and mismanagement. There was thus even less demand for rural manual labour: whereas in the late 1980s, about 40 per cent of Adivasi workers still had more than 200 days employment per year, in 2003, only 4 per cent of them fell into this category.[26]

People at Kottamurade experienced these changes rather acutely. Everybody complained that the number of days of employment they could find locally was decreasing. They had, over the course of the 1980s, seen their upwardly mobile neighbours profit from a booming regional economy in rubber, pepper, and other cash crops that, for a while, even gave the area the reputation of being the 'Dubai of Kerala'. Hardly benefiting from this boom, the people of Kottamurade suffered again when the price of cash crops slumped and the over-use of pesticides and other excesses of industrial agriculture peaked during the 1990s.[27] These processes turned agriculture in Wayanad into an increasingly speculative business, and the village that Kottamurade belongs to became Kerala's 'suicide capital'. The knock-on effect on Kottamurade was that debt-ridden farmers were all the more unwilling to hire Paniya labour. In the place of agriculture, the sector that is now visibly booming in Wayanad is that of tourism, actively promoted as a 'growth engine' to compensate for Kerala's failing

[24] Kannan, K. P. (1999). 'Rural labour relations and development dilemmas in Kerala: Reflections on the dilemmas of a socially transforming labour force in a slowly growing economy'. *Journal of Peasant Studies* 26(2), pp. 140–181.

[25] Kannan, 'Rural labour relations and development dilemmas in Kerala', p. 163.

[26] Aerthayil, Mathew. (2008). *Impact of globalization on tribals in the context of Kerala*. New Delhi: Rawat Publications, p. 69 ff.

[27] See Muenster, Daniel. (2011). 'From farming to speculation: A neoliberal mode of production in hill produce agriculture?'. Paper presented at the 'Agrarian Transformation in India' seminar, 13 July, Oxford University.

agricultural and manufacturing sectors.[28] Nobody in Kottamurade, however, has any prospect of being employed in tourism, though Adivasis loom large as a 'tourist attraction' on billboards and websites such as that of the 'Jungle Retreat' hotel, where one can read that 'Spending time with these people of the forest is an enchanting and fascinating experience'.[29]

In order to make a living, people at Kottamurade—like many Adivasis in India[30]—are increasingly forced to migrate out of Kerala, particularly to Kodagu (formerly 'Coorg') in Karnataka. There they work on a temporary basis on privately owned ginger and banana plantations, often leased by Malayalee farmers and pensioned civil servants trying their luck in a context of heavily fluctuating agricultural commodity prices. People from Kottamurade are drawn to the work by advances of between 500 and 1,000 rupees (10–20 US$) paid to them by labour contractors. These contractors later find ways of not paying them their full wages (e.g. by selling them alcohol and subtracting the money from their wages, or simply through false book-keeping). In Kodagu, not only are minimum wages lower than in Kerala, but there is also further downward pressure on wages because of the presence of migrant workers from elsewhere and because local workers are cheaper since they do not need to be provided with breakfast, dinner or accommodation. The many stories that circulate of sometimes fatal, and often rather mysterious, accidents in Kodagu not only emphasize the potentially extremely high costs of the work and the fact that employers can entirely evade responsibility for workplace accidents, but they also give a glimpse of the menacing atmosphere facing workers.

People in Kottamurade told me that the practice of circular migration to Kodagu started in the early 1990s. Things have gradually grown worse since then as people were initially still able to find work locally in pepper cultivation in February and March. More recently, though, people have had to move to Kodagu even in these months. Sometimes wages are negotiated before workers mount the jeeps

[28] Sreekumar, K. K. and Govindan Parayil. (2002). 'Contention and contradictions of tourism as development option: The case of Kerala, India'. *Third World Quarterly* 23(3), pp. 529–548.

[29] See: <http://www.jungleretreatwayanad.com/mind.htm, [accessed 2 June 2014].

[30] Breman, Jan. (1996). *Footloose labour: Working in India's informal economy*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press; Mosse, David. (2005). 'On the margins of the city: Adivasi seasonal labour migration in Western India'. *Economic and Political Weekly* 9 July, pp. 3025–3038.

taking them to Kodagu—at other times, the negotiation only happens on the way. The migration experience is stressful both because of the bad working and living conditions at the plantations but also because migration is highly stigmatized. Kodagu is generally known as a scary and 'immoral' place. The one advantage of migration—the chance to participate in less strictly regulated, more worldly relationships and circuits of consumption[31]—leads to stigmatizing gossip in Wayanad where one hears people commenting that Adivasi workers go to Kodagu only to buy 'silly consumption items' such as Fair and Lovely (whitening) skin cream or jeans. Adivasi workers are moreover rumoured to practise 'lax morals' there, getting drunk and having 'affairs'. Hence circular migration excludes them literally and metaphorically from full Malayalee citizenship. People at Kottamurade would often tell me that they were evicted from the land occupation at Muthanga because 'people were afraid that if we got our own land, we would no longer come to work theirs'. In the changing economic context described above, this statement, which reflects older experiences (when there was still a demand for Paniya labour locally), seemed to be an attempt to allay a new creeping reality which is perhaps even worse than being exploited: that of being expendable and no longer part of local society altogether.

The structural processes pushing the Paniya out of Kerala society were replicated in miniature—and much closer to the skin—in the colony itself. Kottamurade's land is today registered in the name of Vasi, the son of the deceased *moopan*—the 'traditional' leader of a Paniya community—a position customarily allocated by the landlord to whom the labourers belonged.[32] Inhabitants of Kottamurade all pay rent to Vasi, who also profits from the cash crops grown on that part of the land he manages to keep uninhabited. On the one hand, people in the colony often emphasize their 'gratefulness' to the *moopan* for having 'allowed' them to live on the land. But in so doing, they also hint at the moral obligations of the *moopan* to lead the community. Vasi, however, seems less interested in collective moral claims—or indeed in brokering between the workers at Kottamurade and potential employers—and seems rather more individualistically interested in the land on which the houses stand. Considering the rise in real estate prices, the land could be used much more profitably: it could effectively sustain Vasi's own escape from poverty if he didn't have to house a

[31] See Shah, *In the shadows of the state*.
[32] Aiyappan, *The Paniyas*, p. 80.

group of largely unemployed kin on it. Vasi has thus gradually been trying to get people to leave the colony, for instance by harassing tenants who are overdue on their rent and by refusing permission for new huts to be built or even old ones to be renovated with a municipal subsidy. This in turn increases tensions within families in the colony and often, particularly in the context of alcoholism, sparks off fights. As this 'suffocation' increases, so does people's desire to own a piece of land themselves.

Moreover, education, an arena generally invested with high hopes for emancipation, is increasingly becoming a field of class polarization.[33] The people of Kottamurade were first introduced to reading and writing during Kerala's literacy campaigns in the 1980s. The literacy that a few of Kottamurade's adults then acquired made them eager to see their children go to school. Children I spoke to in Kottamurade dream of becoming 'teachers', 'movie stars' or 'policemen', and their parents say that they at least hope that their children will become educated enough to know their rights, so that they are no longer treated as 'ignorants like us', and perhaps instead of becoming manual labourers, they might climb higher up the employment ladder. Yet overcrowded living quarters and migrating parents do not favour children's education. Some parents struggle all the harder to educate their children—keeping the *anganwadi* (kindergarten) in the colony running, pressuring the municipality for a vehicle to take the children to school, and making their children promise they won't skip classes—but the hope of emancipation that education once offered has all but dissolved. As the level of education needed for a proper job is constantly inflated and 'real schooling' happens only if you can afford private schools and after-school tuition, people at Kottamurade have grown cynical, saying that, at best, school is now a place where their children can get a free lunch.

The Paniya experience of changing class relations is that of being made increasingly expendable as agricultural workers, of being pushed off the land to which in the past they could at least return in-between long periods of seasonal migration, and of having few prospects of their children integrating with society through proper education. This perspective offers a more concrete and relational understanding of their situation than the notions of calculating self-interest or cultural proclivity in helping to explain why people at Kottamurade have begun

[33] See Osella, Filippo and Caroline Osella. (2000). *Social mobility in Kerala: Modernity and identity in conflict*. London: Pluto Press.

to prioritize acquiring land of their own and dream of living there 'autonomously', apart from the rest of Kerala society. These class processes explain why people at Kottamurade increasingly see their difference to others in terms of their Adivasi identity and why they wish to 'reclaim' this identity and save it from its present 'suffocation'. These changes in people's everyday working lives, which in turn shape their outlook on the world, also explain why Kottamurade's inhabitants chose to gather up their few belongings and move to join the Adivasi Gothra Maha Sabha to occupy land at Muthanga in 2003. After their violent eviction from Muthanga, some people at Kottamurade, such as Manju,[34] became ever more convinced by the Adivasi interpretation of their situation. Others, such as Akkathi, however, moved in the opposite direction. In the following paragraphs, I will follow the experiences of these two prominent Kottamurade women to examine people's turn to indigenism on a more personal level. Here again, I suggest that it is not degrees of transcendental Adivasi belonging or simply compliance with dominant NGO and state discourses, but people's everyday lived experiences of coping with changing political-economic relations that best explain their political trajectories.

Class close-to-the-skin

Their eviction from Muthanga was traumatic for most people at Kottamurade. They lost virtually everything they owned and barely escaped attacks by police and locals as they staggered back from Muthanga to Kottamurade. Some of them were injured so badly that they sustained lasting handicaps. Two men were tortured in jail and only came back weeks later, one in such bad health that he died soon after. Many of the local landlords had started hiring other (migrant) workers while the people of Kottamurade were at Muthanga and kept this up even after their return. Children, moreover, were turned away from school for 'skipping' too many classes. The aftermath of Muthanga was thus characterized by heavy loss. How this had come about and how to carry on were topics on which opinions were divided. Manju and Akkathi differed strongly on these questions. As I will

[34] Throughout this article, I use pseudonyms for the names of the people from Kottamurade.

argue, their difference of opinion should be seen in the context of their personal and divergent relational trajectories of class.

Akkathi runs a tiny shop in the colony, selling rice, soap, and other basics, next to the *anganwadi* where she also works as a teaching assistant and caretaker. This latter position provides her with a formal salary of just 500 rupees a month from the municipality—barely enough to cover (subsidized) food and rent, but supplemented by her husband Lalu's income from *cooli panni* (day labour). Moreover, Akkathi's is a steady, secure job that, crucially, gives her access to wider neighbourhood networks, political connections, and government support programmes. Combined with the small amount she earns from running the shop, she has a more secure income than most people in the colony. As she works inside the colony and does not need to commute elsewhere on a daily basis, she can also pay more attention to preparing her two daughters for school every day. She has also enrolled them in the new government savings project for female children,[35] which will endow them with a sum of money at the age of 18. In addition, she arranged government-subsidized health insurance for her family through the female 'self-help group' she chairs in the colony and she has a formal bank account. Despite being based in the colony, Akkathi interacts a lot with other people from the village and is particularly close to some of her Christian neighbours. This is partly due to her role at the government kindergarten and her habit of attending church, and partly dates back to her childhood. She was orphaned after her parents both died of diseases (jaundice and tuberculosis) when she was young and so she was raised by her brothers. Her brothers, partly out of necessity, developed relatively close relations with villagers outside of Kottamurade. Akkathi's brother even managed to acquire a job in a local shop and over time invested in a small plot of land of about 100 square metres just outside the colony; here Akkathi had started building a house for her family. Nevertheless, Akkathi and Lalu decided to join the others at Muthanga as they hoped to own a plot of land of their own—they could not be sure of what would happen to their planned house on Akkathi's brother's land once his children became adults.

[35] Presented as an emancipatory policy to provide women with the necessary funds to pay for education, the policy is popularly known to help families save up for the rising costs of dowries, one of the main institutions undermining the modest emancipatory progress made by the previous generation. See Lindberg, Anna. (2004). *Modernization and effeminization in India: Kerala cashew workers since 1930*, 1st edition. Copenhagen: Nordic Institute of Asian Studies.

Manju and her husband Dasen, on the other hand, have five generations living under the roof of their equally small house, which does not even allow them all to sleep inside. They have three young children, the eldest of whom is of school age, yet is mostly to be found roaming the paddy fields. In *grama panchayat* (village-level decision-making) meetings—a regular feature of the Kerala landscape since the 'people's planning campaign' of the 1990s—Manju often is the first to speak up and is much less inhibited than Akkathi in voicing her opinions. Manju often cannot attend these meetings, however, since both she and Dasen have no other source of income other than *cooli panni* (day labour) and often have to spend weeks in Kodagu working on the ginger plantations there. Their circular migration diminishes their chances of maintaining close ties within the village and complicates the schooling of their children. Manju is not eager to admit to their frequent temporary migration to Kodagu. When the issue comes up, she is always quick to add that men and women at Kodagu 'always have separate places to sleep ... and if there aren't any separate places, then our men will make sure they sleep separately anyway'. Eager to leave their cramped and stigmatized situation behind and build themselves an Adivasi life elsewhere, Manju and Dasan contacted C. K. Janu, the leader of the Adivasi Gothra Maha Sabha, through the organization that initially used to organize literacy campaigns in the colony and managed to become local leaders of the Adivasi Gothra Maha Sabha at Kottamurade.

Whereas Manju led the preparations for Muthanga and took on a leadership position during the occupation, Akkathi went to Muthanga somewhat hesitantly, worried about leaving behind her small shop, her job in the kindergarten, her good connections, and her children's school. Soon enough, tensions between Manju and Akkathi erupted. Akkathi could not understand why the leaders had decided to occupy a wildlife sanctuary, as the last thing she wanted was to live under constant threat from wild elephants and without running water, far away from any shops or schools. Conflict also broke out over the issue of 'Adivasi traditions'. Akkathi described how one day she was told by the Adivasi Gothra Maha Sabha leaders that she had to stop attending church and should stick to her original Adivasi deities, which upset her since she had 'no desire to go back to the old traditions' as she was now of 'many faiths'. Akkathi felt looked down upon by the leaders and eventually claimed she preferred to live among Christian farmers rather than in an Adivasi community such as Muthanga. Tensions further intensified when some of the children at Muthanga fell ill

and Akkathi wanted to leave to seek medical help but was told not to.

There was an element of personal rivalry in the tension between Manju and Akkathi but mostly it was an inevitable result of the Adivasi Gothra Maha Sabha leadership's difficult task of sustaining the Adivasi land occupation in the face of fierce opposition. Political parties and local power holders, threatened by the rise of a new, assertive social movement, started to organize en masse against the land occupation. The way they did this—by raising the question of 'authenticity'—intensified tensions between leaders and participants in the occupation. The 'Wayanad Environmental Protection Organization', led by local notables presenting themselves as 'friends of the Adivasis', claimed the activists were not 'real Adivasis' and published a 'spot investigation report' in which they pointed out that 'Ms C. K. Janu is not representing the real Adivasi cause now because she and her gang men threatened the local tribal people.'[36] They also emphasized the threat to the biodiversity of the sanctuary[37] and circulated rumours that the movement had been infiltrated by 'outsiders'. Understandably, under such circumstances, Adivasi Gothra Maha Sabha leaders felt compelled to enforce consensus, to 'educate' participants in ways of conforming to the discourse of authentic indigenism, and to make sure they would stay put to defend the occupied land in case of attack. As outside threats to the occupation increased, it is easy to imagine the tensions within the land occupation escalating.

All came to a climax when on 19 February 2003, after almost two months of living at Muthanga, a large police force was ordered to put an end to the occupation. The extreme hostility the Adivasi occupiers faced was exemplified in the brutality of the eviction.[38] Indeed, the behaviour of the police reflected more general casteist/racist attitudes, which also were visible in the many incidents in the days that followed when locals identified random 'Adivasis' and hauled them to the police

[36] I talked to some of these 'local tribal people'—Paniyas living near Muthanga—and found they indeed felt threatened: not directly by the Adivasi Gothra Maha Sabha, but rather by how the policing of the situation might spill over and affect them.

[37] They ignored the fact that the occupation actually took place in an area that was far from 'biodiverse' to begin with, since it had been depleted by industrial paper production. See Bijoy, C. R. and Ravi Raman. (2003). 'Muthanga: The real story—Adivasi movement to recover land', *Economic and Political Weekly* 17 May, pp. 1975–1982.

[38] See Bijoy and Raman 'Muthanga: The real story'.

station for their supposed complicity in the Muthanga struggle. In their defence, popular figures like Supreme Court Judge Krishna Iyer reverted to rehearsing the stereotypical romantic image of 'the artless, powerless adivasis, native to this habitat ... terrorized by the law out of their forest dwellings'.[39] There was, however, no compensation for the losses suffered, and worse yet, the court cases against those arrested at Muthanga were left to drag on for years, severely debilitating the movement as a whole.

Dasen—Manju's husband—was among those caught by local people and handed over to the police, who tortured and held him—and his young daughter—in the central district jail in Kannur for over two months. Manju, on returning to Kottamurade after Muthanga, fell ill and was unable to work for a long time, leaving the household dependent on the income that Dasen's mother could contribute from her job as a household servant to one of the neighbouring families. This type of job is particularly resented: even though it is less backbreaking than most agricultural work, it is extremely poorly paid and working conditions are informal. Rather than working in groups, one works alone as the 'personal slave' of the household matriarch. The precariousness of the family's situation and their alienation from Kerala society—the process I described in the first part of this article—strengthened Manju's resolve to fight for a plot of land on which to live the kind of dignified, autonomous life that she had come to associate with Adivasi culture. One of the actions she undertook after the occupation was to stand as a candidate in local elections—not in the expectation of actually winning but 'to make a point: that we Adivasis will only give our vote to parties that work for us, that we can withhold our vote if we wish to'. Manju does not see Muthanga only as a failure and she looks forward to a new opportunity to claim Adivasi land. She takes pride in having participated in the struggle and perceived the greater attention that Kottamurade colony was getting from the municipality as a victory of the Adivasi Gothra Maha Sabha.

Akkathi, on the other hand, looks back on Muthanga with much more bitterness, even though she escaped the violence relatively unscathed. She was lucky that her elder brother, having heard of the impending police assault, came to take her family away from Muthanga just in time. The stark difference of Akkathi's outlook cannot therefore be attributed to the actual losses she suffered during the Muthanga incident. There is, moreover, no difference

[39] Iyer, Krishna V. R. (2003). 'Atrocities on adivasis—I'. Opinion pages of *The Hindu*, 16 June 2003.

between Manju and Akkathi from a primordial 'cultural' perspective—both are kin and grew up in exactly the same local context. What helps to explain their different perspective is Akkathi's chance of escaping the spectre of absolute expediency that haunts most of Kottamurade's inhabitants. After Muthanga, the difference between Manju's experience of expediency and alienation and Akkathi's access to a class trajectory of emancipation through integration into Kerala society became all the more striking. A number of NGOs, which arrived in Kottamurade to hand out blankets and clothes after Muthanga, also helped to restart the *anganwadi* and reinstated Akkathi in her former job. Through her contacts at the municipality, she also managed to speed up her application for a housing grant that would allow her to build a *pukka* house on her brother's land. When I visited Akkathi again in 2009 the house had been completed and she now lived outside the colony, although she still worked in the colony's shop and kindergarten. It struck me that whereas Manju had recently started decorating her walls with 'tribal' patterns, a poster of Jesus was prominently displayed inside Akkathi's home. Her daughters were diligently attending school and there was a strikingly different atmosphere in her two-child, nuclear-family home to that of Manju's overcrowded household in the colony. Unlike Manju's hardening indigenist resolve, the experience of Muthanga had provoked an anti-indigenist response in Akkathi who no longer wanted anything to do with Adivasi politics. Her suspicions that all this talk of Adivasis was in fact a 'game' set up to 'exploit' them had been confirmed to her by the images of women in 'Adivasi dress' now plastered all over hotel billboards. Whereas Manju claimed this redeeming of Adivasi culture as part of the victory of the Adivasi Gothra Maha Sabha, Akkathi saw it as an attempt to portray them as 'animals of the forest' and wanted nothing to do with it.

Conclusion

I noted earlier that the process through which neighbourhoods such as Kottamurade started to become attracted to a politics of indigenism is difficult to grasp in 'emic' class terms, evidence of which is the confused state of debates on the 'identity' question within the Communist Party.[40] Likewise, is it difficult to grasp through categorical class analysis, as often practised by sociologists, precisely

[40] A local joke has it that CPI(M) now stands for the 'Confused Party of India' (Marxist).

because 'precariatization'[41] is a systemic effect rather than a quality of any particular class segment. An expanded class perspective, developing out of anthropological engagement, therefore focuses not on linking people's political claim-making to their particular position in society but to changes in the way they make a living and in their possibilities of social reproduction that are both shaped by wider processes of capitalist restructuring. For the people of Kottamurade, as for the precariat in general, these processes tend to turn companions and neighbours into enemies, leaving the more powerful actors promoting the political economy of neoliberalism at a safe distance. It is sometimes tempting for those observing this scenario to identify the quarrelling that ensues among neighbours as the development of 'class antagonism'. Despite such quarrels, the ordinary inhabitants of Kottamurade have however managed to act on a more political vision of their predicament. It would have been easy for them to start blaming Vasi, the owner of Kottamurade's small piece of land, or their Christian neighbours for their immiseration. If it weren't for the Adivasi Gothra Maha Sabha and, indeed, Kerala's history of intense progressive-secular civil society engagement, these neighbours could have become logical targets of blame, as has happened elsewhere (e.g. in the context of the Hindutva communal neoliberal agenda).[42] It would have been even more likely for the response to injustice to become stranded in a fierce, usually (sub)caste-based, competition over welfare resources that characterizes so many other struggles in India today,[43] or for the response to translate into claims for reservations, which elsewhere in India have become the single most politicized issue for subaltern political assertion.[44] Instead, the Adivasi Gothra Maha Sabha has focused on collective redistributive claims, particularly for land.[45] It has managed to keep

[41] Standing, Guy. (2011). *The precariat: The new dangerous class*. London: Bloomsbury.

[42] Thachil, Tariq. (2008). 'Poor choices: De-alignment, development and Dalit/Adivasi voting patterns in Indian states'. *Contemporary South Asia* 16(4), pp. 441–464.

[43] Chatterjee, Partha. (2008). 'Democracy and economic transformation in India'. *Economic and Political Weekly* 19 April, pp. 53–62

[44] Lerche, Jens. (2008). 'Transnational advocacy networks and affirmative action for Dalits in India'. *Development and Change* 39(2), pp. 239–261.

[45] In a chapter in Parry, the importance of reservations for Dalit emancipation in a state like Chattisgarh has been demonstrated powerfully, yet (though not the focus of the chapter—nor of public debate) the ethnographic material equally powerfully demonstrates the importance of public employment (and of putting employment over profit in planning priorities), without which reservations become largely irrelevant.

at bay political fragmentation and direct the frustration of people such as the inhabitants of Kottamurade towards a more abstract—but more 'real'[46]—class enemy actualized in the direction of the path of development that Kerala is going down. Though not recognized as such in the wooden categories of class that have come to dominate class analysis in Kerala studies, from an expanded class perspective we can see that the Adivasi Gothra Maha Sabha presents an attempt to move within and against a class process as difficult to resist as precariatization.

This type of expanded class perspective can contribute to efforts to break through the immunity to class analysis that India has long enjoyed under the hegemony of the Orientialist tradition,[47] including from its romantic critics writing from an 'Adivasi' perspective, which is imagined as its direct opposite. The latter has been increasingly deconstructed[48] and, indeed, recent anthropological analyses have also paid attention to the 'dark side' of a romantic politics of Adivasi identity[49] and the problems it poses for 'Adivasis-as-proletarians'.[50] And yet the absence of the assertion of an alternative perspective, which goes beyond the deconstruction and critiquing of Adivasi activism, has logically led to question marks about the usefulness of such 'academic exercises'.[51] An expanded class analysis can break

See Parry, Jonathan. (1999). 'Two cheers for reservation: The Satnamis and the steel plant' in Ramachandra Guha and Jonathan Parry (eds), *Institutions and inequalities: Essays in honour of Andre Beteille*. Delhi: Oxford University Press, pp. 128–169.

[46] Smith, Gavin. (2006). 'When "the logic of capital is the real which lurks in the background": Programme and practice in European "regional economies"'. *Current Anthropology* 47(4), pp. 621–639.

[47] Chibber, Vivek. (2009). 'On the decline of class analysis in South Asian studies' in Rina Agarwala and Ronald Herring, *Whatever happened to class? Reflections from South Asia*. Lanham, Maryland: Lexington Books, p. 32.

[48] See Bates, Crispin. (1995). '"Lost innocents and the loss of innocence": Interpreting Adivasi movements in South Asia' in R. H. Barnes, A. Gray and B. Kingsbury (eds), *Indigenous peoples of Asia*. Ann Arbor, Michigan: Association for Asian Studies Inc., pp. 103–119. Guha, Sumit. (1999). *Environment and ethnicity in India, 1200–1991*. Cambridge: Cambridge Studies in Indian History and Society, Cambridge University Press. Bindu, K. C. (2009). 'Constructing the Adivasi identity: Reading the dominant, reading the Adivasi'. PhD thesis, University of Hyderabad, School of Humanities.

[49] Shah, Alpa. (2007). 'The dark side of indigeneity? Indigenous people, rights and development in India'. *History Compass* 5/6, pp. 1806–1832.

[50] Baviskar, Amita. (2007). 'Indian indigeneities: Adivasi engagements with Hindu nationalism in India' in Marisol de la Cadena and Orin Starn, *Indigenous experience today*. Oxford: Berg Publishers, pp. 275–303.

[51] Xaxa, Virginius. (1999). 'Tribes as indigenous people of India'. *Economic and Political Weekly* 34(51), pp. 3589– 3596.

through this deadlock between essentialist versus deconstructionist analysis by throwing light on both the processes of capitalist restructuring that affect people's livelihoods and the way these influence political claim-making. Such analysis can answer a question that remains unaddressed both from a sceptical-utilitarian and a romantic-essentialist position, namely: *why*, if we understand 'Adivasi-ness' as being about political representation rather than cultural essence and see it as coming with a great deal of problematic colonial baggage, has it nevertheless become so popular? When we look at the problem in this way and use a relational, multi-scalar, and dynamic class analysis, we do not just answer the question of why political trajectories take a particular form. We simultaneously contribute a sharpened understanding, crucial for activist strategizing, of the changing relational dynamics of capitalism.

At Kottamurade, people surely had a sense of collective identity—yet that this identity was about being Adivasi or was tied to a wider 'Adivasi homeland' were ideas that had only recently caught on. It was more an outcome of political claim-making than its driver. People's decision to participate in the Adivasi Gothra Maha Sabha's land occupation at Muthanga, moreover, was made with a view to the concrete benefit of getting land but was not a mere tactical, cleverly manipulative performance. Packing up everything they owned and leaving for Muthanga en masse was more like a leap of faith. Both culturalist and calculative explanations are hence misleading and reproduce only the most superficial readings of how indigenist politics emerged in a place like Kerala. For a more grounded explanation, an expanded class analysis can illuminate the deeper structural processes that enticed people to indigenist claim-making. Such analysis is all-the-more needed in Kerala where capitalist restructuring is not so bluntly obvious as it is, for instance, in a state like Orissa where accumulation by dispossession,[52] as it affects Adivasi livelihoods, is there for all to see in the ecological devastation brought by mining companies. In Kerala, dispossession is less visible and pockets of extreme poverty, like that of Kottamurade, simply look like remnants of an earlier, and apparently failed, model of development. What we find when we go beyond immediate appearances, however, is that accumulation by dispossession is in fact taking place in the form of communities being gradually stripped of their social rights and

[52] Harvey, David. (2005). *The new imperialism*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

securities, partly due to the government neglecting its social schemes but in particular due to the fact that these schemes in no way keep pace with the increased commodification of all domains of life, from the nature of employment to housing and education. What was hence a generation ago regarded as a colony of *pukka* houses whose inhabitants felt they were on a progressive trajectory from slavery to citizenship, now looks like a dilapidated collection of huts far from any notion of progress. Though their turn to indigenism involves contingencies such as the fact that some of Kottamurade's inhabitants happened to come into contact with the NGO sponsoring C. K. Janu, people's willingness to turn to a political initiative prioritizing autonomy and land over integration and social security was shaped by this more structural process.

Within the general trend towards indigenist politics among the inhabitants of Kottamurade, I also discussed exceptions such as Akkathi, in whose dilemmas the kind of class relations and everyday processes underlying the shift to indigenism become all the more clear. Though a categorical class reading would place her in exactly the same box as other inhabitants of Kottamurade, the kind of potential emancipatory class trajectories she has access to are in fact quite different from others. Whereas almost all people at Kottamurade had lost earlier claims to employment and indeed were nobody's 'client' any more—a kind of perverse liberation into absolute precariousness—Akkathi, for contingent reasons, still had access to a considerable network of patrons who secured her employment in the government-run *anganwadi* and who also helped her in trying to keep up with the increasing financial demands of proper housing and education. Of course Akkathi could see the general trend of precariatization affecting Kottamurade and knew that if her daily maintenance of good relations with her Christian neighbours and other patrons were to fail, she would also be rendered redundant to the local economy and society. A simple thing such as her brother's children growing up and laying claim to the home that she was hoping to build on his land could make her lose her foothold in the village. Hence although Akkathi was among those most sceptical of indigenist politics, she nevertheless also participated in Muthanga, knowing that her claim to an alternative to an 'Adivasi' livelihood was probably as fragile as the latter proved to be. Akkathi's personal choices thus highlight both the contingencies of an individual's choice to participate in indigenist activism but also the way in which this choice is determined by more structural relational processes that limit the hope one can place

in the kind of social integration that the Kerala model once stood for.

I have argued that Kottamurade colony's desire to fight for a space in which to build up an autonomous Adivasi way of life emerged out of the increasing disillusionment with an earlier, now hollowed-out political consensus regarding the economic integration of agricultural workers. Kottamurade's inhabitants were experiencing the process, identified elsewhere by Breman,[53] of being turned into 'wage hunter-gatherers', forced to engage in constant circular migration[54] and hence increasingly excluded, both physically and morally, from the possibility of emancipation within Kerala society. In the process, it is understandable that people began to envision their future apart from Kerala society and to interpret their past—their Adivasi past—as having been just that. As I have demonstrated, both at the level of Kottamurade colony as a whole and at that of personal political trajectories, class analysis can offer insights beyond abstract self-interest or primordial belonging that help us grasp divergent pathways of political belonging and allow us to understand why people might begin to see both their past and their future in terms of Adivasi autonomy rather than worker's emancipation.

[53] Breman, *Footloose labour*.

[54] Breman, Jan. (2007). *The poverty regime in village India*. London: Oxford University Press.