

Cutting carbon from the ground up! A comparative ethnography of anti-coal activism in India and Australia

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CERTIFICATE OF ORIGINAL AUTHORSHIP

I, Ruchira Talukdar declare that this thesis, is submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the award of Doctor of Philosophy, in the Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences at the University of Technology Sydney.

This thesis is wholly my own work unless otherwise referenced or acknowledged. In addition, I certify that all information sources and literature used are indicated in the thesis.

This document has not been submitted for qualifications at any other academic institution.

This research is supported by the Australian Government Research Training Program.

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Contents

Certificate of Authorship

Acknowledgements

Acronyms

Abstract

Chapter 1: Introduction – Comparative ethnography of anti-coal activism in India and Australia.....10–44

- 1.1. Introduction.....10
- 1.2. Case studies and research questions.....13
- 1.3. Comparative ethnographic research methods and structure.....23
- 1.4. Thesis chapters and literatures.....41

Chapter 2: Literature Review – Differences and common ground between Northern and Southern environmentalisms.....45–77

- 2.1. Introduction.....45
- 2.2. A critique of wilderness-centric Northern environmentalism.....47
- 2.3. Australian environmentalism.....52
- 2.4. Indian environmentalism.....58
- 2.5. Environmentalism’s divisions and common ground in the climate era.....64
- 2.6. Analytical themes from the literature review.....74
- 2.7. Conclusion.....75

Chapter 3: Environmentalism of the poor in neoliberal India.....78–112

- 3.1. Introduction.....78
- 3.2. How the postcolonial state shapes environmentalism of the poor.....79
- 3.3. How the neoliberal state shapes environmentalism of the poor.....84
- 3.4. Environmentalism of the poor in neoliberal India.....99
- 3.5. Analysis: Transformation of India environmentalism.....109
- 3.6. Conclusion.....111

Chapter 4: Radicalising coal in India and politics of the Mahan coal mine.....	113–157
4.1. Introduction.....	113
4.2. Background: Greenpeace’s activism in India.....	115
4.3. Contradictions of coal in India.....	117
4.4. Coal politics, Greenpeace and the Mahan resistance.....	130
4.5. State crackdown and fight back by Greenpeace.....	146
4.6. Analysis: Radicalising coal through critical democracy.....	151
4.7. Conclusion.....	156
Chapter 5: An anti-coal movement in India’s energy capital.....	158–185
5.1. Introduction.....	158
5.2. Background: Development and displacement in Singrauli.....	160
5.3. Use and abuse of the <i>Forest Rights Act 2006</i>	163
5.4. Formation of Mahan Sangharsh Samiti (resistance front).....	167
5.5. Nexus of state and corporation.....	172
5.6. An unusual alliance and its resistance.....	175
5.7. Celebration of people’s rights over forests.....	178
5.8. Analysis: Significance of forest rights in India’s coal capital	182
5.9. Conclusion.....	182
Chapter 6: Australian environmentalism in the mining boom era.....	186–235
6.1. Introduction.....	186
6.2. Contradictions and unevenness of the Australian state.....	187
6.3. Resource boom and contradictions of the Australian state.....	195
6.4. Narratives, politics and alliances of environmentalism during the resource boom.....	209
6.5. Analysis: Transformation of Australian environmentalism.....	232
6.6. Conclusion.....	235
Chapter 7: Radicalising coal in Australia; politics of the Adani mine.....	236-291
7.1. Introduction.....	236
7.2. Contradictions of coal in Australia.....	239

7.3. Environmental politics of the Carmichael coal mine.....	252
7.4. Indigenous land politics of the Carmichael coal mine.....	273
7.5. Analysis: Radicalising coal mining through various contestations.....	287
7.6. Conclusion.....	290

Chapter 8: Resistances from coal’s new frontier the

Galilee Basin.....	292–318
8.1. Introduction.....	292
8.2. Background: Settler colonialism in the in the Galilee Basin.....	295
8.3. Tactics of anti-coal environmentalism.....	298
8.4. Farmers for Climate Action.....	304
8.5. Wangan and Jagalingou’s alliances.....	308
8.6. Analysis: Anti-coal resistances in the Galilee Basin.....	314
8.7. Conclusion.....	318

Chapter 9: Analysis–A global outlook for environmentalism.....319–366

9.1. Introduction.....	319
9.2. Various concepts of climate justice.....	321
9.3. Green relations with Indigenous and farmers’ groups.....	328
9.4. Indigenous land-resistances – W&J and Mahan.....	335
9.5. Coal politics and ENGO campaigns in India and Australia.....	339
9.7. Contributions to Political Ecology.....	348
9.6. A global outlook for environmentalism.....	352
9.7. Recommendation for further research.....	363
9.8. Conclusion.....	364

Appendices.....367–379

1. Fieldwork in India.....	367
2. Interview guide for India.....	371
3. Map of the proposed Mahan coal mine in India.....	373
4. Fieldwork in Australia.....	374
5. Interview guide for Australia.....	377
6. Map of the Carmichael coal mine in Australia.....	379

Bibliography.....380–460

Acronyms

ALP – Australian Labor Party

BJP – Bharatiya Janata Party

CAG – Comptroller and Auditor General

CBA – Coal Bearing Area

CEA – Central Electricity Authority

CSE – Centre for Science and Environment

CPR – Centre for Policy Research

GHG - Greenhouse gas

NGOs – Environmental non-governmental organisations

EPBC – Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999

FRA – Forest Rights Act 2006

IEA – International Energy Agency

LNP – Liberal National Party (Queensland)

MCG – Mackay Conservation Group

MSS – Mahan Sangharsh Samiti

NAPCC – National Action Plan for Climate Change

NAPM – National Association of People’s Movements

NDA – National Democratic Alliance (India).

NDC – Nationally determined contribution

NMP – National Minerals Policy

NTA – Native Title Act 1993

NTPC – National Thermal Power Corporation (Ltd.)

PESA – Panchayat Extension to Schedule Areas Act 1996

MOEF – Ministry of Environment and Forests

UNFCCC – United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change

UPA – United Progressive Alliance (India)

W&J – Wangan and Jagalingou (traditional owners from Central Queensland)

Abstract

In 2009 the United Nations Climate Summit in Copenhagen failed to arrive at a definite pathway for future Green House Gas emissions reductions. The failure prompted a shift in global climate activism towards a direct politics of stopping fossil fuel extraction at source. Based on ethnographic research into anti-coal resistances in Australia and India during this time period, this thesis investigates whether this strategic turn signals the emergence of a new environmentalism. The thesis seeks to understand how and whether earlier environmentalisms have been transformed through new activism to 'keep coal in ground', and whether a common ground can be conceptualised across two disparate contexts of environmentalism such as Australia and India through this new approach.

The thesis finds that Australian environmentalism was re-constituted as an anti-coal climate movement through a decade-long build-up in regions affected by coal mining. It now includes diverse narrative ranging from local environmental effects to climate change. Alliances between environmentalists, farmers and indigenous native titleholders now hold the potential to recast environmental narratives through a new relational politics. From 2014, the Carmichael coalmine in Central Queensland was opposed by a strategic alliance between the Wangan and Jagalingou traditional owners, Australia's largest environmental mobilisation, and local farmers. The movement could not stop the coal mine. It exposed coal's power over Australian politics, and coal became Australia's embodiment of climate change.

In India, the narrative of the environmentalism of the poor, of a rightful share of natural resources, has been recast in a new language of rights over forests through progressive legislations passed in 2006. From 2012, an alliance of forest-dependent communities and Greenpeace India resisted coal mining in Singrauli in central India, a region with the highest national concentration of coalmines and power plants in the country. The movement's narrative of forest rights and success

in stopping the coalmine signified a form of 'democracy on the ground' for India's ecosystems dependent communities, and against the history of Singrauli's industrial development, which dispossessed local communities. The proposed coalmine had been at the centre of 'Coalgate', a large government corruption scandal that exposed 'crony-capitalism' in India. When the state sought to define Greenpeace as a national security threat (for seeking to halt the coalmine), a civil society solidarity campaign supported the anti-coal activism as a critical assertion of democracy.

The Indian and Australian cases of anti-coal activism in this thesis demonstrate material and socio-political differences that are characteristic of a North-South divide, and distinct modes of environmental activism that are characteristic of North-South differences in environmental activism. But they also indicate similar patterns of power of the coal sector over governments, and its effects on environmental governance and democracy. Together, they signify a global outlook of an environmental activism focussed on stopping coal-extraction, which is representative and inclusive of differences. A common ground between these two anti-coal movements can be achieved by finding solidarity between the varieties of human and environmental justice concerns that now find common cause with climate justice.

Chapter 1 – Introduction

A comparative ethnography of anti-coal activism in India and Australia

1.1. Introduction

The climate crisis requires the most drastic global reduction of the burning of coal, oil and gas, collectively called fossil fuels, which make the single biggest contribution towards exacerbating atmospheric carbon dioxide levels.

In response to the climate crisis, global climate activism aims to hasten the transition of economies towards renewable energy by also facilitating a transition away from fossil fuels. The 2009 Copenhagen Climate Summit failed to arrive at a definitive pathway to reduce global green house gas (GHG) emissions. This failure is considered a significant milestone that radicalised the approach of global climate activism, towards directly stopping the extraction of fossil fuels – coal, oil and gas. While activism’s earlier ‘end-of-pipe’ or ‘smokestack’ approach had centred on demands for the reduction of emissions from the burning of fossil fuels, its post-2009 politics aimed to leave fossil fuels in the ground.

Community struggles at sites of fossil fuel extraction have been an ongoing feature in both the global North and the South. However, since 2009, environmental and climate groups in the global North, and international activist networks, began to increasingly politicise fossil fuel extraction, through tactics that included direct disruption at extraction sites and along transport corridors, targeting institutions that funded fossil fuel projects, and mass demonstrations against fossil fuel projects. Fossil fuels are inextricably linked to economic development. Targeting coal, oil and gas extractions brought national political economies of energy-development under the purview of environmentalism. It also brought

environmental activism into direct conflict with issues of energy security and the national interest in fossil fuel centred economies.

Six years after Copenhagen, the Paris Climate Summit set emissions reductions targets to limit global warming to within two degrees. It is well understood that meeting the goals of the 2015 Paris Agreement requires a rapid phasing out of fossil fuels, and for those fossil fuels not yet extracted to be left in the ground¹. In the case of coal, the biggest contributor to global emissions, being able to meet the Paris targets implies that all existing coal reserves must be phased out within the next decade, and no new coalmines developed (Steffen 2015).

The Paris targets deepened the contradictions between the economic imperatives of fossil fuel producing countries and the global imperative of addressing climate change. Nations dependent on the production of fossil fuels have experienced economic conundrums owing to a simultaneous increase in globalised trade of fossil fuels during the time that the world has tried to forge a climate change agreement (Eckersley 2009). Governments in coal producing countries around the Globe have followed the contradictory policy tracks of agreeing to emissions reductions while simultaneously expanding coal production. The entrenched power of the fossil fuel sector has often hijacked the ability of governments to move away from fossil fuel extractive projects, despite global market withdrawals and the decreasing costs of renewables (Healey et al. 2019).

This conflicting political economic backdrop set the framework within which the post-Copenhagen environmentalisms of challenging fossil fuel extraction have played out. This thesis focuses on resistance to the extraction of coal in the global North and South, through an investigation of two anti-coal movement case studies, one in Australia and one in India. Community struggles at coal extraction sites have been an ongoing feature in both hemispheres. However, such conflicts might not explicitly challenge coal as a fossil fuel, but for the deleterious effects of its

¹ For a 50:50 chance to keep global warming within 2 degrees, 88% of the world's coal reserves, 52% gas reserves and 35% oil reserves need to be considered 'unburnable fuel' and left in the ground (Steffen 2015).

extraction on the lands, livelihoods and cultures of those communities (Roy and Schaffartzik 2021).

After Copenhagen, climate activists began widely politicising coal extraction as the main source of carbon emissions, adding a global scale of relevance to local struggles against coal. In *This Changes Everything*, activist Naomi Klein (2014) proposes a vision and politics of solidarity with grassroots and local resistances to fossil fuel extraction for climate activism's new approach. Using case studies, this thesis investigates how this new approach plays out in the contexts of Australia and India, and asks whether it signals the emergence of a new global environmentalism. The thesis is based on ethnographic research of an anti-coal movement in India, and one in Australia, during this globally relevant time period of climate action through stopping coal extraction, between the 2009 Copenhagen summit and the 2015 Paris summit.

India and Australia stand out in the global coal economy, as two countries still continuing to expand coal production, even after global coal demands have declined, and the converging timeline of the Paris Agreement in 2015 has made it imperative to rapidly phase out coal production. The North-South economic divide between the two countries creates a deep unevenness in the imperatives and politics of coal-led growth.

A North-South divide is also reflected in their environmentalisms, and can be partly attributed to their economic divide. A characteristically Northern approach of nature conservation is known to persist in Australian environmentalism, and a contrasting Southern focus on livelihoods of ecosystem dependent communities is known to dominate Indian environmentalism. Through an evaluation of the movement cases in India and Australia, the thesis seeks to understand whether the new approach creates possibilities for common ground across this divide in environmentalism between the North and South, and what that looks like.

Section 1.2, introduces the two case studies, the research purpose, and the questions. The case studies focus on a specific contested coal mining site and the

concomitant anti-coal movement in India and Australia respectively. I also situate the case studies within the broader political economic and ecological contexts that have shaped them in their respective countries.

Section 1.3 describes the ethnographic research structure and methods used in this thesis. Subsection 1.3.1 mentions the primary and secondary research methods used. Subsections 1.3.2 and 1.3.3 summarise the themes and structures of the Indian and Australian fieldwork respectively, while 1.3.4 and 1.3.5 discuss the similarities and critical differences in the structures of the two cases, based on literature from the field of comparative environmentalism within social movement theory. Subsection 1.3.6 discusses my ethnographic research practice and justifies the lines of inquiry used in the thesis. Subsection 1.3.7 examines the political ecological framework, and through a discussion of some political ecological research studies, argues why the framework is suited for this thesis. Finally, section 1.4 provides an outline of the thesis chapters; it mentions the various literatures used in the chapters and how the primary research is presented in them.

1.2. Case studies and research questions

The need for a rapid phase out of fossil fuels has put coal at the centre of difficult questions that need to be asked about the relationship between climate action and development (Edwards 2019). Owing to a considerable difference in the imperative for economic development between the industrialised and industrialising economies of the world, the need to phase out coal has placed uneven challenges on the coal-led countries of the North versus the South. Ironically, the difference between North and South economic standards also signifies an uneven distribution of the effects of climate change. While these consequences are already being felt globally, their burden will be borne disproportionately by the poor and ecosystem-dependent communities of the South. Coal-led Southern geographies in particular, therefore, find themselves in a deep dilemma regarding present and future needs.

Australia and India represent this North-South unevenness in developmental imperatives. Despite both regions being considerably affected by climate change, the scale of the internal challenges they face – balancing growth that is coal oriented while addressing these impacts on their own populations – vary significantly due to the North-South divide. Both countries have continued to deepen their respective internal contradictions between development and climate action by increasing coal extraction. They have done so despite a decrease in coal production and increase in renewable energy production globally, and stand out as two of the top four countries – the others being China and Indonesia – proceeding with major new coal mining developments since the Paris Agreement in 2015 (Climate Analytics 2019)².

Internationally, both countries have continued to extend characteristically Northern and Southern positions on expanding coal-extraction: Australia on grounds of its relatively small net emissions on a global scale (since over 80% of its extracted coal is exported and does not count towards domestic emissions since it is burnt in overseas thermal plants), and India from the perspective of equity due to an extremely low per capita emissions, and the historic right to develop as a postcolonial nation. These contexts expose various contradictions in the political economies of coal in India and Australia, and help to explain the significance of the respective anti-coal activism, against the reality of exacerbating climate change.

A final North-South difference that is central to this thesis lies between the history of environmental movements in both countries – specifically, within Australia’s dominant legacy of nature conservation and India’s movements for environmental justice for nature dependent subsistence communities. These legacies and historical narratives pertain to movements from the 1970s and 1980s in both geographies that I discuss in Chapter 2.

The North-South divide in environmentalism between Australia and India brings into question what critical similarities and differences of narratives and politics

² This occurred because the Chinese demand for coal that used to account for around half the world’s coal consumption fell in ‘absolute terms’ around this time (Climate Analytics 2019).

are likely to be reflected in their anti-coal resistances. It raises the possibility of considering their respective transformations from historic legacies, due to sweeping socio-economic changes and increased environmental conflicts from the mid-1990s in both countries, and how such alterations reflect in today's anti-coal movement narratives. Finally, it considers whether a common ground across Northern and Southern environmentalism can be achieved through a common anti-coal focus. The following subsections lay out the Indian and Australian contexts along the points raised above, introduce the two cases of coal mining and anti-coal activism, and approach the research questions as an investigation of environmentalisms.

1.2.1. The Indian context

India is one of the fastest growing major economies and coal supplies 56% of its electricity (Central Electricity Authority 2019). India has also parallelly developed a large renewable industry. In its Nationally Determined Contribution (NDC) submission for the Paris climate summit, India made a substantial commitment to source 40% of its electricity from renewables by 2030, by aiming to have 175 gigawatts of installed renewables capacity by 2022, and 500 by 2030, from the present 71 gigawatts (Varadhan 2019). However, India has stated the centrality of coal in its energy mix into the future; economic growth is anticipated to involve expanded coal extraction from domestic reserves and private mining from offshore reserves, although the aim remains to reduce coal imports for energy security (Rosewarne 2016).

In its NDC, India indicated its present day developmental priority was to provide electricity to the nearly 300 million poor that still live without power (Government of India 2014, p. 4). Electricity use is strongly linked to development in the Human Development Index. India has close to 18% of the world's population, but also high social inequality and a significant poor population. Consequently (even though it is now the world's third highest GHG emitter) owing to the negligible carbon footprint of the poor, its per capita emissions have remained one of the lowest in the world. As the most abundant fuel, coal has played a central role in India's post-

independence nation building and has become synonymous with the national interest (Lahiri-Dutt 2016). Thermal power is strongly linked to poverty reduction, and constitutes the moral basis for India's coal-led development.

India is also one of the regions most vulnerable to climate change, due to its disproportionate burden on the poor. Predicted impacts include displacements driven by sea level rise and coastal erosion (Hazra et al. 2002), increasing frequency and duration of heat stress (Somanathan et al. 2017), impacts of monsoon variability on agriculture on which 65% of the population relies (Pai et al. 2017; Roxy et al. 2015; Roxy et al. 2017), and risks to water supplies (Adve 2019).

While emphasising its historic disenfranchisement from and its present right to growth, India paid insufficient attention to its own vulnerabilities from climate change during the initial phase of international climate dialogues (Raghunandan 2019). Successive Indian governments have articulated 'climate justice' in terms of India needing the carbon space to grow as a postcolonial nation (Goodman 2016). However, its rising emissions from the mid-1990s brought pressure from large industrialised nations, particularly the United States, to acknowledge its contribution to future emissions (Vihma 2011).

The National Action Plan for Climate Change (NAPCC), adopted in 2008, linked developmental and climate objectives through a 'co-benefits' approach, aiming to 'increase the living standards of a vast majority' in order to reduce their 'vulnerability to the impacts of climate change' while simultaneously making this development path 'environmentally sustainable' (Government of India 2008, p. 2). Paradoxically, coal-led development was seen as central to the co-benefits approach to mitigate the effects of climate change on the poor.

India's coal-led development has been responsible for the land dispossession and loss of livelihoods of India's indigenous Adivasi ('native dweller') and peasant communities. From the mid-1990s, India started both to privatise and expand coal and thermal power production to sustain a high growth rate of 8% of GDP. Given

India's inequality and highly uneven development, the change in the role of the state to that of a broker for private corporations – to acquire land for private coal mining – challenged the already fraught idea of public interest in India's growth (Levien 2011). Even without the challenge of climate change, the pursuit of coal-led industrialisation through neoliberal economic measures has exacerbated land disposessions and livelihood disruptions for vulnerable communities, escalating ecological conflicts. India currently has the highest number of environmental conflicts in the world (Environment Justice Atlas 2016).

1.2.2. The Australian context

The alignment of the Australian economy with major emerging economies in Asia, to supply vast demands for minerals and fuels including coal, has been a primary pillar of Australia's industrial and economic policies. Due to this continuing and growing resource demand, Australia has steadily increased its coal production and exports since the beginning of the recent minerals boom from the mid-1990s, and is now the world's largest coal-exporter.

Australia has protected and prioritised its resource exports-driven economic pathway over climate action through the 'no regrets' approach, stipulating that 'Australia should not implement measures that would have net adverse economic impacts nationally or on Australia's trade competitiveness, in the absence of similar action by major greenhouse gas producing countries' (Commonwealth of Australia 1992) Australia has also argued against emissions reductions as a principle, stating that 'we only put in 1.4% of the [net global] emissions (Prime Minister John Howard, quoted in Bulkeley 2000, p. 725).

A well-coordinated campaign of climate change denial, operating across politics and Australia's mining sector, has consistently discredited climate science and the need for emissions reduction, while strengthening the interests of coal and gas extraction (Baer 2016). This combination of policy approaches and political factors have also resulted in Australia having one of the highest per capita emissions in the world; Australia's 1.4% of net global GHG emissions is produced by a mere 0.3% of

the global population. The emissions intensity comes from a high reliance on coal-fired energy that supplies 75% of the country's electricity. Australia currently lacks a policy pathway to decarbonise its domestic energy in the immediate future (Climate Analytics 2019).

Paradoxically, Australia is one of the world's most climate-vulnerable industrialised nations. It is the driest inhabited continent on earth, and is already experiencing increased temperatures, increased severity of droughts and heatwaves, increasing frequency and intensity of bushfires, and reduced patterns of rainfall in the dry interior regions. These results are expected to increase over time, and affect crucial ecosystems, such as the Great Barrier Reef on which the tourism industry depends, and risk climate exposed export sectors such as agriculture (CSIRO 2016). The demonstrable effects of climate change in Australia have worsened alongside the intensifying minerals boom, which has led to an unprecedented scale of resource-extraction, including coal.

The scale of Australia's minerals boom opened up regions previously unexplored by the coal and coal seam gas (CSG) industries to commercial development. This generated widespread social discontent, particularly where coal and CSG extraction encroached on prime agricultural lands. Australia has vast reserves of coal, which if extracted and burnt, can substantially alter the global climate. Therefore, it is now considered the global frontline to keep fossil fuels in the ground (Rosewarne et al 2014). The minerals boom has generated various tensions and imperatives for mobilisation against coal and coal seam gas mining, such as, for environmentalists, between the rampant scale of Australia's coal mining and the global climate imperative of phasing out coal reserves for environmentalists, and for farmers, by governments prioritising coal mining while marginalising their needs. Reflexively, climate change has emerged as an embodiment of various concerns over coal mining in Australia (Duus 2013).

1.2.3. Case studies

The Singrauli region in the central Indian state of Madhya Pradesh, and the Galilee

Basin region in the Central Queensland region in Australia, where the prospect of new coalmines has sparked anti-coal protest movements, serves as the comparative cases for this thesis.

In the Singrauli region in central India, an alliance between the Indian arm of the international environmental organisation Greenpeace and a local mobilisation of eleven forest dependent village communities succeeded in their struggle to stop coal mining in the last remaining tracts of old-growth Sal tree forests in Asia (Talukdar 2018a). Although Singrauli is one of India's oldest and most extensively mined coal regions, new coal developments are now spreading into the residual intact forests on the fringes of its coal fields, threatening wildlife connectivity and the livelihoods of subsistence-based and Adivasi communities.

The 1000 hectares open cut coalmine in the Mahan forests, jointly owned by the companies Essar Energy and Hindalco Ltd., was first proposed in 2009. It would have jeopardised the livelihoods of 54 forest dependent villages (Padel 2016). The coal mine became the centre of a central government corruption scandal on coal mine allocation, known as 'Coalgate'. The Indian government eventually cancelled the coal mine allocation in 2015, following the directive of the Supreme Court of India, based on a corruption investigation. Yet the same government targeted Greenpeace India, as part of a nation wide crackdown on non-governmental organisations (NGOs) working on human rights issues and critical of the ecological and social impacts of industrial projects. Greenpeace was singled out for its anti-coal campaign. Its bank accounts were frozen, and its capacity to operate its campaigns severely constricted (Talukdar 2018d).

In Australia, the Carmichael coalmine, owned and operated by the Adani Group, was initially slated to be Australia's largest coal mine. However, it has become the strategic and symbolic focus of a multi-pronged resistance, including the environment movement under the 'Stop Adani' campaign, local farmers, and the Indigenous traditional owners under the 'Adani, No means No!' land rights campaign. It is located in the Galilee Basin, Australia's largest and previously

untapped coal reservoir, where nine mega coal mines were proposed at the peak of Australia's minerals boom in 2011.

Coal extracted and burnt at full capacity from all the proposed mines would make Galilee the seventh biggest emitter in the world, with the rest of Australia occupying 14th place (GP Australia 2012a). It risked depleting water reserves from Australia's largest underground reservoir the Great Artesian Basin, it has affected the land rights of the Wangan and Jagalingou (W&J) traditional owners, and threatened damage to the Great Barrier Reef through port expansion and increased coal traffic (Environment Law Australia 2016). The coalmine received environmental clearances a year before the Paris climate summit. It faced a concerted civil society resistance for eight years but finally began operations (albeit in a drastically reduced capacity) in 2019, due to ongoing political support and despite its financial unviability (Talukdar 2019c).

Maps of the proposed mine sites are included in the Appendices; see no. 3 for the proposed Mahan coal mine and no. 6 for the Carmichael coal mine.

1.2.4. Research aims and questions

This research brings together, and cuts across, a few overlapping fields. Against the backdrop of global environmental activism's new strategic focus on stopping coal extraction, it attempts to understand how this approach interacts with other, local opposition around lands, livelihoods and shared natural resources affected by coal mining. Effectively, it aims to understand what collective meaning emerges from today's resistances to coal, and what politics and vision it generates for environmental activism.

Given the similar timescale of Australia's minerals boom and India's neo-liberalised economic growth, that caused widespread ecological transformations and escalated land and natural resources related socio-environmental tensions, the thesis first takes a broader view of the profile of current environmental resistance, within which the specific anti-coal resistances are situated, in both

countries. It attempts to understand how these economic forces, encouraged by the actions of governments, accelerated ecological destruction and triggered new environmental resistances. It endeavours to understand how the two anti-coal resistances contribute to the broader picture of contemporary environmental activism, in Australia and India respectively, and what critical new dimensions they add to these landscapes.

The thesis studies anti-coal activism against the contrary policies and politics of governments that promote coal production despite aggravating climate change and other destructive ecological effects, and against increasing social disaffection. This approach brings into consideration the role of the state, and the relationship of the state to the various actors and affected communities who are resisting coal projects, including environmental activists. The case studies attempt to draw out how the increasing disaffection of communities against governments, is shaping new solidarities and alliances against coal mining.

Finally, the comparative purpose of this thesis is to articulate the critical similarities and differences between the Australian and Indian environmental movements. In chapter 2, I discuss the distinctions between Australia's nature-conservation focussed Northern environmentalism, and India's livelihoods-centric movements of subsistence Adivasi and peasant communities; between eco-centric and human-centric concepts of environmental justice; between the notion of nature as an untrammelled wilderness, and nature as the place where people 'live, work and play'; and broadly between the rich and poor societies from which they arise.

Historically, these environmentalisms have lacked a shared ground. The fixed ontology of Australia's radical eco-centric environmentalism made collaborations challenging, with a majority of Indigenous-green interactions in Australia between the 1970s and 1990s indicating a fundamental mismatch of visions (Dodson 1997; Pickerill 2018). The scientific conservation model of nature preservation has had a deleterious effect when exported to populous landscapes in the global South such

as India, where Adivasi communities have been driven off their ancestral lands for the creation of national parks (Guha and Martinez-Alier 1997).

The universal nature of the climate problem, and the need for global action for climate justice, makes it imperative to know the critical differences between environmental movements arising from disparate Northern and Southern contexts today, and to understand what common ground can look like. At the same time, global movements driven out of the North run the risk of interpreting Southern contexts through lenses that can simplify and polarise the experience of Southern marginalised communities. In particular, transplanting Northern environmental discourses to the South has hampered a contextualised understanding of the relation between poverty and environmental justice to emerge (Lawhorns 2013). Western environmental justice research and activism need to contextualise southern environmental actors fully in order to avoid misunderstanding, misinformation and misguided action (Williams and Mawdsley 2006).

The strategic focus of international environmental activism on 'keeping coal in the ground' via an emphasis on anti-coal resistance, and more generally the global fight against all fossil fuel extraction, generates a set of normative and empirical drivers to attempt bridging the conceptual divide between North and South environmentalism. A comparison of anti-coal resistances across that divide, one that offers a detailed engagement with all contexts and participants, constitutes a necessary step in that direction. Through its focus on the common challenge of stopping coal extraction in two disparate geographies, this thesis aims to uncover the common ideologies and politics that span environmentalism's North-South divide. It aims to suggest a narrative of anti-coal activism that is globally representative.

Research Questions

Approaching the two anti-coal movements from the perspective of the historic differences in the politics and visions of their respective environmentalisms, the thesis asks four interconnected research questions:

In both cases, how have the discourses and politics of environmentalism transformed from the previous era?

With regard to the respective anti-coal activisms, what is the state and civil society dialectic and how has coal-extraction been radicalised?

What are the discourses, tactics, and relations of the respective anti-coal activisms? What is their significance for environmentalism and its context in Australia and India respectively?

What are the critical similarities and differences between the two anti-coal resistances and their contexts? What outlook for global environmentalism emerges from a comparison of anti-coal resistance in India and Australia?

1.3. Comparative ethnographic research methods and structure

The questions and lines of inquiry in this thesis were strongly guided by the interview responses and the findings from the various participant observations. My research took an immersive, ethnographic approach, and the structure of the research was guided by my understanding of the similarities and differences between the two cases that emerged through primary research. The following subsections discuss the research methods, themes from the fieldwork, the structure of the research and its analysis, the ethnographic research practice involved, and the theoretical framework used herein.

1.3.1. Methods and materials

The primary tools for the ethnographic research were participant observations at multiple locations and events and semi-structured interviews. During my field trips to both Mahan and the Galilee Basin, I recorded field notes on a daily basis. These consisted of reflections on the day's meetings and interactions, as well as observations of every day life. I also recorded daily notes during participant

observations at the Greenpeace office in New Delhi and the Mackay Conservation office in Queensland, reflecting on interactions with staff and volunteers. I maintained an additional record of observations at various 'Stop Adani' public events I attended in Australia.

The interviews were based on a guide of semi-structured questions, and lasted for approximately an hour each. They were recorded and then transcribed. All interviews and interactions at Mahan in India were in the Hindi language, which I can speak and read. All interviewees have been de-notified in the thesis, and in the case of the local respondents from Mahan, their names changed, for privacy.

The secondary materials for the research included news media articles, legal documents, ENGO reports, and expert analyses reports. The news articles were obtained through a filtered keyword search online. For the Indian case I also searched Hindi language local news articles based on a similar method. Campaign materials included ENGO press releases and feature articles, campaign videos, pamphlets, and banners.

In India, a web-based community radio channel called Radio Sangharsh ('Radio Resistance') set up by Greenpeace India, proved a chief resource to study the local movement in Mahan. It contained testimonials and accounts from local movement members on key movement moments and the interference of the local administration and company officials in their activities. Another source of information at Mahan was the diary entries of one of the movement leaders that he shared with me, which captured his personal experience of key moments in the movement between 2012 and 2014.

1.3.2. Fieldwork and themes from India

As a part of my Indian fieldwork, I conducted participant observations at the Greenpeace campaign office in New Delhi and at Mahan in Singrauli, Madhya Pradesh, the site where the coal mine had been proposed, plus 22 semi-structured interviews, between 2017 and 2018. Seven of these were with Greenpeace staff, six

with local movement leaders in Singrauli, and nine with other civil society actors based in New Delhi.

Three interconnected themes emerged from the interviews with the three respondent groups. The first, from the nine interviews with non-Greenpeace and non-Mahan respondents (civil society actors), was around how neoliberal economic development since the mid-1990s had affected the environment and transformed environmental activism in India, and the relevance of the Mahan movement (and its success) for the current landscape of environmental resistance. The respondents were selected from a network of activists, researchers, lawyers and journalists I am familiar with, based on my background in environmental activism in India. These initial interviews played a substantial role in the selection of the Mahan coal conflict and anti-coal resistance as the Indian case study given its relevance across multiple scales. This includes both the regional and national scales of coal and environmental politics in India, and the international scale where it was recognised as a climate justice struggle through the involvement of the global ENGO Greenpeace. Importantly, these factors associated with the Mahan coal conflict and resistance also generated comparable parameters with the Australian case, making this the obvious choice for the Indian case in this thesis. I discuss the comparability of the two cases a little later under section 1.3.5.

The second, from the seven Greenpeace respondents, was around the formation of the Mahan campaign as a part of the new global strategy to 'keep coal in the ground', and contextualising the global approach to the reality of a massive expansion in coal mining in India, in the thickly forested central region. Five of the Greenpeace respondents were in the campaign team that worked in Mahan, while the sixth and the seventh were Campaign and Communications Managers located in the New Delhi office. The third, from the six prominent leaders of the local movement at Mahan, consisted of biographical accounts of their motivations to join and fight against the coal mine, emphasising their dependence on the forests for their livelihoods. The interviews were conducted during field visits to Mahan and after a degree of familiarity had been established with the respondents.

Based on the themes emerging from the interviews, this thesis has taken a political-ecological approach to understand the environmental and social impacts of India's post-liberalisation growth, and to analyse the significance of the Mahan movement, and the community's assertion of their newly found forest rights under the *Forest Rights Act 2006* (FRA)³ to reject coal mining, against the broader tableau of environmental resistance in the neoliberal era. It traces the social and ecological impacts of both a massive increase and a privatisation of coal mining and thermal power generation since the mid-1990s. The build up of the Greenpeace and the Mahan community's anti-coal movement, and the subsequent government hostility towards Greenpeace, is projected against the special political treatment given to coal in India's development, and the nexus-between the state and the coal mining corporations.

Threatened livelihoods, linked to altered social and environmental conditions are central to political ecological studies (Bryant and Bailey 1997). Political ecology assumes that the human impact of environmental change is unevenly distributed, with the poor and marginalized groups facing its impacts disproportionately (Watts 1983). The significance of the Mahan movement, particularly the local community's rejection of coal mining based on an assertion of forest rights, is assessed against the Singrauli region's history of land dispossession and livelihoods destruction from decades of intensive coal mining and thermal power generation. The Indian case study chapters 3,4 and 5 are structured around these lines of analysis. I have provided a detailed account of my Indian fieldwork and the interview questions in Appendices 1 and 2 respectively.

1.3.3. Fieldwork and themes from Australia

I spread my Australian fieldwork out over the first three years of my candidature, between 2016 and 2018, when the collective movement against the Carmichael coal mine was in its most active phase. Stop Adani, the environmental movement

³ The Forest Rights Act (2006) concerns the entitlements of forest-dwelling Adivasi and non-Adivasi communities related to land and other resources. These communities had been denied their natural and historic rights over forestlands and resources even in post-independence India, owing to the continuation of British-colonial era forest laws.

in the collective resistance to the coal mine, operates at both the national and local levels. I followed the actions of both the national Stop Adani movement in Sydney and Melbourne (where it has very large volunteer bases), and the regional movement in Central and North Queensland (in Townsville). I visited Queensland three times between 2016 and 2018, spending a week based at the Mackay Conservation Group's office in Central Queensland in 2017 for participant observation. I also travelled to the Galilee Basin during that trip to Central Queensland, and spent three nights on a cattle property adjoining one of the proposed mega mines, hosted by a farmer who was opposed to coal mining in the Galilee Basin.

I conducted 24 semi-structured interviews, 10 of which were with representatives from national ENGOs that are part of Stop Adani, based either in Sydney or Melbourne, nine with representatives of environmental groups in Queensland, based in Mackay, Brisbane, Townsville and Airlie Beach on the Central Coast, three with the farmers advocacy network against the coal mine, based in regional towns in the Galilee Basin, and two with representatives from the Wangan and Jagalingou (W&J) traditional owners' campaign against the Carmichael coal mine, based in Brisbane. I also attended eight Stop Adani protest gatherings and public mobilisation planning sessions across Melbourne, Sydney and Brisbane between 2017 and 2018.

For the national ENGO representatives, the focus of the interviews was on understanding how the minerals boom has transformed environmentalism, to trace the emergence of the Stop Adani movement along a continuum of environmental resistance since the mining boom, and to understand how its tools and tactics differed from earlier movements. The ten respondents were selected from a network of activists I am familiar with; the selection of respondents was representative both in terms of participating organisations in Stop Adani and factors like seniority, area of experience and expertise and gender. For Queensland ENGO representatives, the interviews concentrated on the environmental impact of the coal mining boom in Central Queensland, on the weakening of environmental regulations, and the challenges faced by local and state-level

groups. For the farmers against the Galilee coal mines, the interviews focussed on their grievances and their motivation to advocate against coal mining. For the W&J representatives, the interviews focussed on the grounds for their rejection of the Carmichael coal mine, the stages of the 'No means No' campaign, and their motivation and reasons to fight.

The conflict over the Carmichael coal project and the environmental, Indigenous and farmers' streams of resistance to it, emerged as the choice for the Australian case study due to its relevance across the regional, state and federal scales of coal and climate politics in Australia, and its global recognition as a resistance to stop a 'carbon bomb', as the Galilee Basin coal projects and particularly Carmichael came to be known. Further, with various strands of Australia's environment and climate movements coming together to oppose the Carmichael coal project, making it Australia's largest environmental mobilisation between Copenhagen and Paris, it served as an obvious choice as the Australian case study.

Based on the themes emerging from the interviews, in Chapter 6 I locate the rise of new forms of environmental activism in response to a combination of Australia's lack of action on climate change and the environmental and social effects of an unprecedented scale of coal extraction and export in mineral rich regions from the mid-1990s. The emergence of the Stop Adani movement, its tactics and tools, is analysed in Chapter 7 against the context of Queensland's coal export boom and Australia's continuing climate inaction after the Copenhagen summit, as a new wave of environmental activism strategically focussed on 'keeping coal in the ground'.

Farmers' activism against coal and coal seam gas mining is analysed as due to the cumulative impacts of the minerals boom – the extensive scale of mining, its effects on land and water, and its encroachment on fertile agricultural lands – and growing grievances against the state's structural marginalisation of agriculture in favour of mining. The land rights campaign of the W&J is understood within the context of the shifting relations between the state and Indigenous groups during the resource boom, based on the state's role in promoting and encouraging

extractive projects. The Australian case study chapters 6,7 and 8 are structured around these lines of analysis. Chapter 8 analyses the significance of the three anti-coal mining activisms – that of environmentalists, farmers and the W&J traditional owners – against the political and economic context of coal in Central Queensland, Australia’s largest coal-exporting region. I have provided a detailed account of my Australian fieldwork and the interview questions in Appendices 4 and 5 respectively.

1.3.4. Similarities based on fieldwork – research and chapter structures

The immersive fieldwork and the interviews helped to clarify similarities in the way civil society and environmental movement actors in India and Australia interpreted the actions and the significance of the respective anti-coal movements. Respondents on both sides referred to a similar time frame of two decades, beginning in the mid-1990s, as critical for understanding the considerable ecological destruction and social discontent that formed the backdrop to today’s environmental activisms. This similarity helped to structure the cases as a longitudinal study of environmentalism, and how they were transformed in response to the minerals boom in Australia, and the neoliberal phase of economic development in India.

The other significant and interrelated similarity emerged around the central role of the state in producing these transformations. The historic and continuing reality of the Indian state’s role in deepening environmental injustices for the Indian poor, and the Australian state’s role in escalating injustices for Indigenous communities, are directly comparable. Furthermore, the grievances of Australian farmers, and the discontent of local and grassroots environmental actors against the ecological impacts of extensive coal mining during the minerals boom, underscore their changing relationship with the state, which they see as favouring mining corporations against the public interest.

These similarities make political ecology, which considers the central role of the state and the dialectics of state and civil society actors, the primary theoretical

approach to this thesis. Using political ecology as its theoretical framework, the thesis draws out and then critically compares the roles played by Indian and Australian states in shaping the respective coal conflicts and shaping the imperatives of the anti-coal activisms. The case studies therefore discuss the changing character of the Australian and Indian state, under the effects of the minerals boom and neoliberalism respectively. They approach the transformation of environmentalism through an investigation of how the state's actions intensified the disaffection of impacted communities – livelihoods communities in India and Indigenous communities and farmers, and the environmental movement, in Australia. The cases further investigate the new relations between the participants in the anti-coal movements – environmentalists, farmers, and Indigenous groups in Australia, and the international ENGO Greenpeace and local communities in India. The relations of local constituents with green groups in both cases are investigated as caused by a growing disaffection with the state over its favouring of corporations at the cost of community rights.

1.3.5. Challenges and opportunities in a North-South comparison of environmentalism

Between the Mahan forests and the Galilee Basin, a difference can be observed regarding what is vitally at stake across environmental justice movements in the settler colonial Northern and postcolonial Southern regions. The most significant resistance to the coal mine in India came from the project site itself, from forest-dependent subsistence-based communities living primarily outside the capitalist market system. The proposed coal mine threatened to displace them from their homes and lands, and disrupt their forest-dependent livelihoods. This immediate risk added a critical urgency to their struggle for human rights, which is characteristic of Southern environmental conflicts. In Australia on the other hand, the bulk of the resistance came from urban-based volunteers and supporters of ENGOs, a primarily tertiary-educated segment of Australian society with left-leaning and progressive political views and a high level of concern for green issues and climate change (see Chapter 2).

The W&J have ancestral ties to the land and the waters in the Galilee Basin, and in that respect come closest in comparison to the Adivasi people in Mahan. However the spatial difference between Mahan and the Galilee – between significant human settlements dependent on subsistence livelihoods, and sparse habitations and industrial scale agricultural operations of the Basin’s farmers – remain. The cattle properties in the Galilee are massive in scale – it took us up to 45 minutes to drive through one – creating a sense of vastness and remoteness amongst the community living around the fringes of the proposed mines.

Literature from the field of comparative environmentalism acknowledges the disparities in the political contexts of industrialised and industrialising nations, even in the case of democracies (for example, see O’Neill 2012). Infact, while acknowledging the unavoidable disparity of cases, the North-South comparative framework for environmentalism actually seeks to highlight such critical contrasts, to demonstrate the diversity in social responses to environmental problems across countries being compared (O’Neill 2012). The North-South frame is one amongst various frames and debates comparing environmentalisms around the world (Kousis et al. 2008).

Although the conflict over the Mahan coal mine and the anti-coal activism of Greenpeace and the Mahan community became a national issue, the movement lacked multiple environmental campaigning organisations, unlike the case in Australia. Compared to Australia, where the entire national environmental movement transformed to a politics of stopping coal outright, in India the interviews verified what is commonly understood amongst civil society actors, that ENGOs and advocacy groups avoid taking a direct approach towards the ‘sectoral targeting of coal’. Further, climate change did not become an issue for the mass mobilisation of subsistence communities. These contrasts indicate two very different societies, and who constitutes the majority of environmental actors in those societies, and what their imperatives are. They also highlight the very different political challenges for environmental organisations and peoples’ movements, as well as the very different framings of environmental conflicts, in the South (Haynes 1999).

However, the presence of Greenpeace in India, an international ENGO whose global campaign strategies are driven out of the North, has added a strongly comparable dimension to the two movement cases. One way in which the North-South gap can be bridged is through campaign-based studies (Doyle 2005). Greenpeace's anti-coal campaign in the Mahan forests is a reflection of the new global strategy for climate activism through politicising coal mining and directly intervening to stop coal mining projects. The selection of the anti-coal mining movement in Mahan as the Indian case was strongly determined by this factor. A second factor for the particular selection of these two movement cases for comparison was the various levels of contention against coal that they generated, from the local to the national and international, as discussed in sections 1.3.2 and 1.3.3.

A third factor was the presence of a significant Indigenous resistance and contention to the coal projects. The disparity in North-South comparative environmentalism research can also be bridged through a comparison of global grassroots uprisings that face similar challenges (see Peluso and Watts 2001; Taylor 1995). More specifically, this research's comparison of Indigenous contestations to coal mining, between a postcolonial Southern context and a settler colonial Northern context, contributes to a global understanding of Indigenous resistance to fossil fuels in the climate era. While the W&J formed solidarities with First Nations struggles against fossil fuel extraction in Canada and the United States, no connections were forged with Adivasi coal mining conflicts in India related to the Adani Group, the Indian conglomerate who is also the proponent of the Carmichael coal mine in Queensland. Tracing their similarities and disparities through research is even more significant given the North-South divide that can act as a barrier for them to join in solidarity.

Finally, there is a growing interest within the field of comparative environmental movements to expand the unit of analysis to include a variety of state and non-state actors (and their interactions) working in a given issue area (Balsiger 2007). The relational politics between the various anti-coal constituents in the collective movement in Australia, and between Greenpeace and the Mahan community in

India, makes a contribution to this aspect of research in comparative environmentalism.

1.3.6. My ethnographic research practice

Ethnography is a qualitative research method that approaches the study of social movements from the perspective of the people involved (Bouma and Atkinson 1995). Ethnography can capture detail and nuance amongst emergent networks taking action off the radar of the policy sphere (Dryzek 2000), helping to identify how social movement actors, who have been 'framed out' of formal policy discussions in the first place, are framing issues in their own terms (Plows 2007).

It can be described as embedded participant observation, or fieldwork that involves an immersion in the research site and its practices (Plows 2007). Ethnographic descriptions can provide a sense of actually being there during movement actions (Geertz 1989). Although the original anthropological practice of ethnography involved living within the communities being studied, today (especially across other fields within the social sciences) ethnography is practiced with a focus on 'what happens in a particular work locale or social institution when it is in operation' (Hammersley 2006, p. 5).

For this research, apart from observing sites and groups across two different countries, I also had to follow the flow of the campaign events and the movement of actors at various locations where meetings and protests were taking place. Even in the Indian case, although the bulk of the resistance came from the actual project site in the Mahan forests, it would not have sufficed to observe the movement at Mahan alone. To observe and understand, and then be able to describe and analyse all the dimensions and scales of the Indian movement, I needed to spend time with urban-based environmental activists, primarily in the Greenpeace office. The range of sites that needed to be observed for the Australian movement was far more extensive. The current ethnographic approach of part-time participant observation proved effective for following the movements across various locations.

Ethnography is also suited for the investigation of social structures that are constituted across multiple scales (Gille and Riain 2002), making it relevant for this thesis. It can 'directly examine the negotiation of interconnected social actors across multiple scales' (Hammersley 2006, p.), becoming a process 'of translation and weaving, articulating distinct, often unrelated and widely dispersed knowledges' within movements (Casas-Cortes et al. 2013, p. 224). This research observes and analyses how the different imperatives and activism streams within the collective resistance to the Carmichael coalmine in Australia, and the local movement and Greenpeace's activism against the Mahan coal mine in India, intertwine, and what kind of shared politics they produce.

Ethnography's engagement with people and place can generate critical insights in a way that traditional objectivist methods cannot (Juris and Khasnabis 2013). Spending time in the villages in the Mahan forests in India had offered me a fully immersive experience in another life-world, one that was non-capitalist and centred on a forest-dependent subsistence. In a very sharp contrast, fully immersive moments in the Australian movement had occurred in metropolitan settings, at Stop Adani mass protests and climate marches and rallies. The ethnographic approach helped me to convey this fundamental difference between the dominant environmental actors and their activisms in the North and South, and fully contextualise their contrasting worlds through rich accounts of experiences that can prove insightful.

The coming together of multiple grievances into a collective resistance against coal mining in the two cases, and the attempt of this research to find inter-connections between them, shares ethnography's perspective on activism in the era of globalisation: instead of a singular historical subject, Hardt and Negri (2000) have posited the idea of a new subjectivity, the multitude, that is unified by a collective opposition to, for instance, global neoliberal capitalism. Harvey (1996) also underscores the phenomenon of global capitalism driving ecological destruction and causing the 'irruption of place based reactionary and progressive struggles' (p. 44), and emphasises a focus on place and place-based observations in order to achieve 'one of the biggest challenges of the 21st century – defining a politics that

can bridge the multiple heterogeneities, including most emphatically, those of geography, without repressing difference' (p. 483).

This approach also closely corresponds with the structure of resistance that Naomi Klein envisages as critical – a globally linked network where climate activists are standing in solidarity with and sharing the struggles of various local resistances to fossil fuel extraction – to break the global power of the fossil fuel industry. In *This Changes Everything*, Klein (2014) offers an account of the global phenomenon of Blockadia, which is 'not a specific location on a map but rather a roving transnational conflict zone...wherever extractive projects are attempting to dig and drill' (p. 295). Blockadia is characterised as a broad and disparate movement that is motivated by multiple grievances (also see Brown and Spiegel 2017; Martinez-Alier et al. 2016). Blockadia is however not a new concept; the idea originated from a peaceful uprising in the Niger Delta against the oil corporation Shell, after oil spills destroyed the lands of the Ogoni and Ijaw peoples (EJAtlas 2014). It subsequently spread to other parts of the world (Martinez-Alier et al. 2018).

As an activist turned insider researcher, I see my role as that of interweaving understandings across the contextual differences between Australia and India, and highlighting their similarities, to conceptualise a common ground on which transnational solidarity can be built. Having worked within the environment movement in both places – with Greenpeace in India, and with Greenpeace and the Australian Conservation Foundation in Australia – their critical differences and similarities have constantly served as points of reflection for me. While the disparities in their previous narratives and outlooks, due to Australian environmentalism's primary focus on nature conservation, had seemed insurmountable, its new politics and its working in solidarity with other resistances at sites of coal extraction have generated strong empirical grounds for this comparative thesis between Australia and India.

The presence of the Indian conglomerate Adani Group in Australia, and the controversy around its Carmichael coal mine, triggered an interest within the Australian environment movement about the environmental struggles of Indian

communities against coal mining, particularly against the Adani Group that has a track record of environmental breaches. This interest helped me to deepen my research approach, which is practice-based and politically engaged, and collaborative with the environmental movements and organisations I research, essentially an activist approach to researching social movements (Plows 2008).

Presentations and workshops with various Stop Adani groups and ENGOs, have helped Australian environmental activists to understand the contrasting context of India's national coal politics, and the imperatives and challenges of its anti-coal movements, with the aim of building transnational solidarity on resisting coal. I provide a detailed account of the workshops in Appendix 4. Therefore, my method of research can definitely be considered as a form of action research (Fuller and Kitchin 2004). Some of the common themes of the various forms of action research are that it is 'empirical and reflective' and 'engages people as active participants', and often empowers the social movement (Stringer 1999, p. 18).

Trust and access are key issues in social movements, and gatekeeping can often occur in ethnographic settings. Insider research can prove to be a methodological bonus in such settings (Plows 2007). This was definitely the case during the fieldtrips to Mahan in India. The local movement leaders opened up to me and discussed intricate details of village-level politics, caste and land related disputes, and recounted their personal experiences of the struggle, due to accepting me as 'one of them' (meaning the Greenpeace team).

As an activist turned inside researcher, I specifically undertook what Stringer (1999) calls reflexive action research, which involves locating the self in the research. I have trained within the context of Southern environmentalism. My awareness of the structural dominance of Northern environmentalisms' narratives, and their tensions with Southern contexts, has been informed through my experience in Greenpeace's Indian office. While working with Greenpeace Australia and later the Australian Conservation Foundation, I experienced the tensions in the politics of eco-centricity that dominated the conservation focussed campaigns of ENGOs, and Indigenous perspectives on land management. My interest in a

systematic analysis of the historic divisions and present possibilities for common ground between eco-centric environmentalism and human-centric perspectives of environmental justice (of the Southern poor as well as Northern movements of environmental and Indigenous justice) emerged from this collective understanding.

My perspective and practice contributes to action research on climate justice and North-South environmentalisms in specific ways. As opposed to western climate justice research that often attempts to align concepts and politics from the South with contexts derived from North (Williams and Mawdsley 2006), my past and present immersion in both the Australian and Indian movements helps to elucidate comparable frameworks from both locations, aiming to fully contextualise Southern actors. Further, while being critical of the practices and politics of Southern environmentalism (see Chapter 2), operating from a perspective of Southern justice, I bring an alternate, in fact a reverse perspective to North-South comparisons of environmentalism, as compared to the majority of the research undertaken in this field so far. Because 'neutrality' and 'objectivity' are impossible in ethnography (Becker 1974, p.107), this reverse gaze has helped to highlight and compare elements in this research that might have traditionally been deprioritised.

Land rights and Indigenous justice are crucial elements of comparison in this thesis. Beyond the case study and research structure, which involves an analysis of Indigenous land reforms in both countries to legally contextualise the land struggles of the W&J and the forest-dependent Mahan community, the comparison was deepened through continuing engagements with the W&J representatives and their interest in understanding the post colonial context of Adivasi land rights in India. Issues such as the lack visibility for Indian Adivasis and their challenges in accessing democratic platforms, despite the presence of progressive legislations such as the Forest Rights Act (FRA) formed a central point of our continuing conversations. I regularly published articles in India highlighting the W&J's land rights challenge to the Adani Group. Their legal and global challenge to the

Carmichael coal mine brought a vicarious sense of justice to several communities affected by Adani's coal mines in India (Talukdar 2019a).

Finally, with the anti-coal movement in India having experienced repeated government repressions, my Indian research between 2017 and 2018 proved useful in documenting a critical period in national coal politics and the future of the international ENGO Greenpeace in India. Greenpeace had survived the 2014 crackdown. But following a subsequent freezing of all its bank accounts under the Indian government's orders, it was forced to close down nearly all of its campaign programs and both its campaign offices in January 2019. My critical commentary on the crackdown on Greenpeace (Talukdar 2018d, 2019) as a part of a broader attack on civil society organisations under the Narendra Modi government offers perspectives on the risks of anti-coal activism in the Southern context and the challenges of North-South collaborations for climate action.

1.3.7. Political ecology as a theoretical framework

This thesis brings together literature and knowledge from multiple, intersecting fields. The two case studies combine historical relations, antagonisms, and contexts of various environmentalisms in both Australia and India, as well as the political, social and ecological realities of coal extraction and its effects. With its place based focus and consideration of social ecological processes, historic power struggles and inequalities, the field of political ecology amalgamates the analysis of socio-ecological problems with the political economy. Despite relevant criticism regarding its primarily local focus that I discuss in Chapter 2, political ecology is relevant for a substantive and critical comparison of the two cases. In the next few paragraphs I discuss some prominent political ecological texts, and argue why this theoretical framework is most suited for the thesis.

Political ecological studies have been primarily based in the Global South, where they have traced the struggles of cultivators and hunter gatherers due to the enclosure of commons (Bryant 1998; Peluso 1992), the continuation of colonial legacies through state organised scientific forestry (Guha 1989; Jewitt 1995), and

the role of gender in the construction of scientific knowledge, distribution of environmental rights and responsibilities, and grassroots activism (Agarwal 1997; Carney 1996; Joekes et al. 1995; Rocheleau et al. 1996). India's earliest political ecological work *Economy of Permanence* (1945) by Gandhian economist J. C. Kumarappa, discussed what constitutes a non-violent socio-economic order. Although generally lacking a global focus, some texts (see Ghai and Vivian 1992; Friedmann and Rangan 1993; Neumann and Schroeder 1995; Peet and Watts 1996) have probed the national and international significance of micro-political ecological struggles.

More recently, texts on ecological conflicts in industrialised societies and particularly North America – such as the transformation of wetlands in Minnesota and Illinois (Robertson 2000; 2004) and forests (Prudham 2003) and feral lands (McCarthy 2001; 2002) – have begun establishing First World Political Ecology as a field of study. They have begun to diversify the narrative and focus of political ecology by including notions of marginality, land management and place of nature emerging from Northern and particularly settler colonial contexts (Wilson 1999). Scholars have argued that this emerging area needs to critically reflect on what constitutes 'a context of, and for political ecology', on the relationship between political ecology and spatiality, in the First World (Wainwright 2005, p. 1034); that research in settler colonial societies needs to include a careful analysis of colonial practices (Braun 2002).

Guha and Martinez-Alier's *Varieties of Environmentalism; Essays North and South* (1997) provided a systematic critique of the supposed dominance of Northern wilderness-centric environmentalism, by highlighting ecological struggles of various marginalised communities across several societies and historical periods, in South America and South Asia. It took a multidisciplinary approach, combining anthropology, economics, sociology and ecology, to construct 'an alternative and sometimes oppositional framework from the conventional wisdom of Northern social sciences' (p. 14). The cases delineated the specific geographies, material conditions, and communities from which the environmental conflicts arose. It underscored that the theorisation of nature and hence the construction of

environmentalism is grounded in what Harvey calls the 'materialities of place, space and environment' (1996, p. 44).

Despite historic limitations around its field of visions, owing to its central focus on place, the political ecological framework is an effective approach for studying multi-scalar contestations centred on sites of coal extraction in the two case studies in this thesis. Political ecology's focus on place helps to expose the layers of histories, complexities in human-nature relations, and the relational dialectics between different interest groups over shared resources; these aspects constitute central lines of inquiry in the Australian and Indian cases in this thesis. Another strong relevance of political ecology for this thesis is its focus on the state. The relational dynamic between the state and anti-coal constituents, and how this has transformed over time, is a central analytical theme; this in turn helps to interpret relations between the respective anti-coal constituents in both case studies.

With its strategic focus now on stopping coal projects, environmental activism's actions are inextricably tied with coal's infrastructure and systems – mines, ports, railroads, and thermal power plants – as well as financial institutions that are funding coal projects, towards which it directs a variety of disruptive tactics (Brown and Spiegel 2019). These actions have the potential to impact the national and international political economy of coal. Other grievances brought by non-environmentalist actors, which relate to natural resource or land conflicts, represent a more immediate and material risk from the coal projects. How these different sets of interests against coal extraction intertwine and strengthen each other in the collective anti-coal resistance can offer a new environmental understanding.

This thesis contributes towards research on cross-contextual comparisons of environmental movements in three significant ways. Using the political ecological approach, it investigates relations between environmentalist and non-environmentalist constituents in both the cases, and compares the contextual differences in the nature of relations between the two cases. Through an investigation of the process and characteristics of the collective politics and narratives emerging from the Australian and Indian movements, it contributes to

research on current environmentalisms across the North-South divide. The various scales of resistance demonstrated by the two movement cases – the local, the national, and the international – offer perspectives on scalar relevance of micro-struggles against coal in the era of climate change. These three research directions also contribute to the field of political ecology by extending the framework to areas where existing studies have paid insufficient attention, such as relations between local actors and NGOs, addressing contradictory and multiple claims around sites of conflict, and the multi-scalar relevance of micro-struggles particularly from the Global South. I further discuss gaps in existing political ecological literature and how this research addresses them in the literature review sections 2.4 and 2.6 of Chapter 2.

1.4. Thesis chapters and literatures

The thesis combines a few different analytical approaches. Overall it compares two present day environmental resistances in the North and the South, specifically against coal extraction. It approaches this comparison by analysing of the transformation of respective environmentalisms by the actions of the state and exacerbated resource extraction since the mid-1990s. It dissects the two anti-coal resistances, what imperatives and events shaped their formation, and what political impact they had at various levels. It evaluates the relations between different sets of actors in the respective collective movements, and how they generate a collective narrative and shared politics. Based on this, the thesis begins with an outline of theoretical debates on Northern versus Southern environmentalisms, followed by three chapters each on the Indian and Australian cases, and closes with an analysis of the comparative themes across those cases. Due to the multiple analytical approaches the thesis uses assorted literatures that inform various discussions. Each case study chapter was also specifically structured around a set of primary research findings. I will now summarise the literatures and research presentations in the outlines of the respective chapters.

In this chapter, the Introduction, I have introduced the research topic and questions, the research approach and structure, and discussed my own

ethnographic practice. I have also briefly discussed some political ecological texts that are relevant for the theoretical approach in this thesis. Chapter 2 analyses the historic divide in Northern and Southern environmentalisms, and the possibilities for common ground between them in the present era of climate change through literature. It contains a summary analysis of what constitutes Indian environmentalism of the poor, and the Australian conservation-focused environmentalisms – their politics, challenges and dominant criticisms. It sets the historic context of the respective environmentalisms against which the new environmental movements are evaluated.

Chapters 3, 4, and 5 constitute the Indian case study. Chapter 3 lays out the broader context of the political economy of development in India, and traces today's environmentalism of the poor as malcontents emerging from within this milieu. The transformation of the Indian state under neoliberalism, and how this increased the grievances of livelihoods-based communities, is analysed through discussions of literature of the postcolonial Indian state and the neoliberalism in the Indian context. Today's environmentalism of the poor is analysed by a discussion of some of the most significant peoples' struggles for livelihood and land in the last two decades. This chapter is based on interviews with the nine non-Greenpeace, non-Mahan respondents.

Chapter 4 begins by discussing the centrality of coal in the Indian political economy, and the changing character of coal-development under neoliberalism. It locates the build up of the political conflict over the Mahan coal mine within this paradigm of coal-led development, and particularly against the state-corporate nexus in coal. It traces the formation of the Greenpeace and local movement against the illegal approvals and other controversial high-level government actions on the project. It analyses the government's suppression of Greenpeace for its anti-coal activism. Instead of mass assertions for climate action, after the crackdown, the government's assertion of coal was challenged by parts of civil society as a risk to democracy in India. This chapter is based on interviews with the seven Greenpeace staff.

Chapter 5 traces the formation of the local anti-coal movement through the perspective of its local leaders, with a central focus on the significance of the *Forest Rights Act 2006* (FRA) in the lives of indigenous forest-dwelling communities. It analyses the significance of the anti-coal uprising in India's energy capital, the Singrauli district. This chapter is based on interviews with the six Mahan leaders.

Chapters 6, 7 and 8 comprise the three chapters of the Australian case study. Chapter 6 lays out the broader context of the economic and political transformations brought by the minerals boom that began in the mid-1990s, and traces the emergence of a new anti-coal approach of environmentalism, the rise of farmers' protests against coal and coal seam gas, and the participation of Indigenous native title groups in collective resistance against coal mining projects, in response. It discusses how the actions of the state were changed by the scale of the globalised resource boom through literature on resource curse and neoliberalising political economy. It also discusses the changing priorities of the state with regards to Indigenous land reforms. Today's environmental movements are analysed through a discussion of some of the most prominent anti-coal resistances, involving collaborations with farmers and Indigenous groups, that emerged in response to the minerals boom in Australia's dominant coal mining regions. This chapter used interview results from both the national ENGO and Queensland ENGO respondents.

Chapter 7 begins by discussing the importance of coal extraction and export to the Australian economy, and how the massive scale of coal mining operations during the resource boom started changing the economic and ecological balance of coal regions, and changed the behaviour of governments. It traces the development of the Carmichael coal mine project through a series of special favours from both state and federal governments. It traces the development of the environmental activism against this state-corporate nexus, and analyses its impact on the national politics on the issue of the Carmichael coal mine. It traces the farmers' opposition to the coal mine through their growing discontent at the allocation of free and unlimited water resources to the Galilee Basin coal mines. It traces the build up of

the W&J's land rights resistance as a challenge to Australia's native title system as a response to having faced coercion by the mining corporation, and within the Native title system, to consent to coal mining on their lands. This chapter also uses interview results from the national and Queensland ENGOs and W&J respondents.

Chapter 8 traces the three different streams of resistance against the Carmichael coal mine that emerged locally – the local arm of the Stop Adani environmental movement, the local farmers protests, and the W&J's land resistance. It analyses their relations, and what their collective resistance means for the settler colonial past and historical political relations in the region. This chapter uses interview responses from the W&J and farmer respondents, as well as a smaller set of interview results from national and Queensland ENGO respondents.

Based on these, Chapter 9, the Analysis, the final chapter, discusses the various themes of similarities and critical differences between the Indian and Australian case studies. It draws multiple points of comparisons – between the concept of climate justice and the use of climate change issue for mobilisation, between the politics of the Indigenous arms of both resistances, and between the framing of the national environmental problem by ENGOs in Australia and Greenpeace in India. It summarises how this thesis has built on existing political ecological studies and contributed to this field of study. It concludes by arguing for a representative and inclusive perspective from both the North and South in research on climate justice and anti-fossil fuel movements, to help a global outlook and significance of the new approach of environmentalism to emerge.

Chapter 2

Differences and common ground between Northern and Southern environmentalisms

2.1. Introduction

The sites in this research are the meeting grounds for multiple grievances against coal mining. The Mahan forests in central India are the meeting grounds of the historic forest rights of the Adivasi and other forest-dependent communities, and the climate-related contestation of the international environmental organisation Greenpeace. In Central Queensland in Australia, an anti-coal environmental movement meets with the Wangan and Jagalingou (W&J) traditional owners' claims for historic land justice along with marginalised farmers who are fighting to protect underground water resources from the effects of coal mining. This chapter sets out the contexts of environmentalism across the North-South divide, against which can be observed the formation of collective movements at the sites of coal mining conflicts in India and Australia, and the inter-relations between the various strands of environmental resistances that are meeting at the sites.

Environmentalism, a term that broadly stands for a collection of ideologies, politics and actions towards the environment, has essentially been variously realised by movements emerging from different socio-economic and socio-ecological contexts. The conceptualisation of wilderness-centric environmentalism, practised in the United States and similar cultural geographies such as Australia, has been critiqued from the perspectives of human-centric environmental justice of marginalised communities, such as the environment justice movement in North America, and the environmentalism of the poor in the Global South (Martinez-Alier 1995). By deeming places from where Indigenous presence has been removed by the violent process of settler colonialism as pristine, wilderness-centric

environmentalism has not only disregarded but also been complicit in perpetuating historical injustice.

Based on an analysis of literature, Section 2.2 delineates the multiple criticisms of wilderness-centric Northern environmentalism. The legacy of American environmentalism has cultural and historical bearings on Australian environmentalism, which shares its dominant wilderness ethic. This section is structured around historic criticisms of American environmentalism from the perspectives of various subaltern politics of eco-social justice. Section 2.3 specifies the politics and narratives of Australian environmentalism between the 1970s and 1990s. Section 2.4 specifies the politics and narratives of the environmentalism of the poor in India during a similar time period, contrasting it with Northern environmentalism. Collectively, these three sections set out the historical contexts and divisions across the various concepts of environmental justice and their politics.

Climate change has made it imperative for Northern environmentalism to transform towards a politics of solidarity with human-centric modes of environmental justice, based on a realisation that 'what we are fighting for [now] is each other' (Stephenson 2015, p. xv). Section 2.5 analyses the conflicts as well as the possibilities for common ground between Northern and Southern perspectives of environmentalism in the era of climate change. Subsection 2.5.1 discusses the dominant Southern criticisms of Northern approaches towards 'burden sharing' and historic responsibility for climate change. Subsection 2.5.2 discusses how the quest for climate justice has reconstituted the politics and perspectives of various modes of environmental resistance. Subsection 2.5.3 suggests possibilities for common ground between environmentalism's historic divide, through a common yet diverse understanding of climate justice. A common frame across the North and South needs to fully contextualise Southern environmental actors instead of treating them as distant 'others' in narratives frames shaped by Northern contexts.

Section 2.6 summarise the themes that emerge from this literature review chapter and discusses how they shape the structure and analyses of the Australian and

Indian movement case studies. Section 2.7 concludes by arguing that a movement towards a shared understanding of climate justice signifies a resolution of the historic divide between environmentalism's Northern and Southern approaches. The cases in this thesis offer insights as to how Northern environmentalism now inter-relates with human-justice centric environmentalisms of marginalised groups, and how a representative and global perspective on climate justice can emerge by investigating the activisms and their respective contexts, in both the North and the South.

2.2. A critique of wilderness-centric Northern environmentalism

Both the popular and radical streams of scientific ecology emerged as practices of environmentalism in the United States and similar cultural geographies. Popular wilderness environmentalism emerged as a post-war cultural phenomenon through an expansion of state and national parks for the aesthetic appreciation of a new consumer class (Hays 1987). Wilderness was consequently attributed a high place in national cultural identity (Nash 1982). The creation of the national parks systems in the United States also led to the removal of Indigenous communities to construct a wilderness that was 'uninhabited as never before in the history of the place' (Cronon 1996, p. 15).

Growing enthusiasm for outdoor recreation and an awareness of environmental degradation through works such as Rachel Carson's *Silent Spring* (1962) increased the popularity of the wilderness (Novotny 2000). Wilderness environmentalism therefore demonstrated settler colonial societies' paradoxical ability to 'devastate the natural world and at the same time mourn its passing' (Ekirch 1963, p. 189). It imagined remaining forests and uncleared landscapes as spaces preserved from industrialisation's contamination: 'As pervasive a problem as DDT was, and is, one could, and can always imagine that somewhere a place existed free of its taint' (McKibben 1989, p. xii).

In contrast, the radical eco-centric movement viewed the world as an interconnected web of relations, including human-nature relations and non-human

communities (Eckersley 1992). Its philosophy and politics developed as an unstable and paradoxical amalgam of scientific and romantic traditions in America and similar cultural geographies (Hillier 2010). The paradox of radical ecology can be seen in the dichotomy between its philosophy and its objective. The former was constituted of the interdependence of humans with nature, influenced both by the natural sciences, particularly the writings of Aldo Leopold and James Lovelock, and the humanities, through the writings of Murray Bookchin and Joanna Macy, amongst others. Paradoxically, its objective remained to maintain a separation between society and nature (Milton 1999).

Radical environmentalists argued that their activism borrowed elements of nature-romanticism from eastern religious traditions while not regressing into mystical faiths, striving instead to preserve wilderness based on a scientific understanding of ecology (see Devall and Sessions 1985; Naess 1973). Going back to nature was intended to create a profound cognitive change. The radical purpose behind this approach was to break Judaeo-Christianity's disconnect and domination of nature in order to generate a cultural and social realisation of nature's intrinsic values (Naess 1973).

Historian Roderick Nash's thesis *Wilderness and the American Mind* (1982) identified nature conservation through national parks as America's distinctive cultural contribution to the world, one that 'less developed nations may eventually evolve economically and intellectually towards'. Social scientist Ronald Inglehart's postmaterialist thesis (1977, 1990, 1997) further claimed that environmentalism, defined as an appreciation of wilderness spaces, was a new value born from intergenerational cultural turns in industrialised post-war industrial societies.

Wilderness-centricity and postmaterial values were shared by both radical and popular environmentalisms, and were demonstrable through the declaration of national parks, 'an area where the earth and its community of life are untrammelled by man, where man himself is a visitor who does not remain' (Wilderness Act 1964). America's Yellowstone, established in 1872 was the

world's first national park, followed a close second by Australia's The Royal National Park.

Both the popular and scientific expressions of wilderness-centricity were underpinned by deep ecology's vision of wilderness as the only authentic essence of nature since it predated human occupation (Foreman 1998). The assertion of scientific conservation's universal relevance and the political and social implications of its assumed supremacy has been challenged along interconnected lines of cross-disciplinary scholarships and activist writings.

The wilderness thesis made it evident that who got to define nature and consequently how nature was constructed was essentially about who had power (White 2004). By excluding urban and industrial concerns, environmentalism deflected awareness from everyday places and their realities (Cronon 1996). Therefore, even as American environmentalism took on big new challenges in the 1970s, it ended up excluding certain kinds of people. Such exclusions assumed racial overtones against the backdrop of historic settler colonialism and structural social inequalities (Purdy 2015).

The scientific conservation model of the North also carried portentous consequences when applied to the Global South, by forcing the displacement of nature-dependent communities for the creation of national parks. The dispossession of Indigenous people from their lands for the creation of Tiger Reserves in India is considered a clear example of the deleterious effect of the Northern conservation model in Southern geographies (Guha and Martinez-Alier 1997; Rangarajan and Shahabuddin 2006). On the basis of this effect, historian Ramachandra Guha has argued that the practice of scientific conservation can result in a direct transfer of resources from the poor for the benefit of the rich, causing critical social injustices (Guha 1989b, 1998).

Guha made a further distinction between the philosophy of Arne Naess, the founder of deep ecology, which he found to reflect a concern for social inequality (see Naess 1973), and later writings on deep ecology that informed American

environmentalism (see Devall and Sessions 1985). Guha (1989b, 1998) argued that the latter demonstrated a lack of concern for the ecological burden of the poor. Overall, critics found that the wilderness thesis informing the politics of American environmentalism did not allow the environmentalism of the poor, which could arise both from within and beyond Northern geographies, to be expressed (Martinez-Alier 1995).

Texts such as *Varieties of Environmentalism; Essays North and South* (Guha and Martinez-Alier 1997) challenged the universal relevance of American environmentalism through a conceptual analysis of empirical cases of socio-nature relations and politics from diverse geographies. It argued for clearly articulated environmentalisms in the Global South, with entirely different imperatives and politics from that of the North. The Southern environmentalisms of the poor can be understood as dominated by both the materialities of disproportionate ecological burden from industrial activities and the disadvantage experienced by the poor in accessing natural resources (Martinez-Alier 2002). Southern environmentalism remained preoccupied with 'shallow' ecologies such as pollution control and agro-ecology, and aimed to secure a just share of the commons – land, water, fisheries, and forests – that were vital for the subsistence of communities (Gadgil and Guha 2000).

Scientific ecology's claim to universality has been challenged even within the same geography on account of the presence of 'different kinds of societies' (Harvey 1996, p. 44) that express different environmentalisms, particularly the paradox of what Doyle (2005) describes as the majority worlds of the poor within the minority worlds of the affluent. In the 1980s, while radical eco-centrism aimed to preserve wilderness through scientific ecology, the emergent environmental justice movement in North America, which represented the struggles of low-income classes and vulnerable communities of racial minorities, including Native Americans, aimed to stop governments and corporations from turning poor neighbourhoods into hazardous waste sites (Baer and Singer 2020). Being concerned with the direct impacts of social and economic inequalities, it aimed for a future based on justice, empowerment and accountability. For affected

communities, the environment occurred where they 'live(d), work(ed) and play(ed)⁴ (Gottlieb 2005, p.34). Instead of standing apart, nature was understood as enmeshed in the political ecology of social relations (Escobar 1999; Peet and Watts 1996; Zimmerer 2000).

Critics also questioned the relevance of radical eco-centrism in addressing the underlying causes of environmental degradation. Carson's expose of the chemical industry through *Silent Spring* (1962) and the *Limits to Growth* report (Club of Rome 1972), which identified resource depletion, overpopulation, and pollution as threats to humanity's future, brought industrial development in its entirety into environmentalism's focus. *Limits to Growth* introduced terms such as the earth's carrying capacity into its lexicon. Environmentalism's response was to develop an eco-centric philosophy. Paradoxically, even though eco-centric environmentalism's narratives 'rail(ed) against the destruction of the world', its politics turned on an 'enlightened individualism' instead of collective social action to transform destructive global capitalism (Hillier 2010).

Guha (1989b) contended that this approach demonstrates that environmentalism's values were shaped by a unique environmental history, and not the universality that the 'New Ecologists' of the 1980s laid claim to. In *The Trouble with Wilderness: Or Getting Back to the Wrong Nature* (1996), historian William Cronon also similarly argues that the notion of wilderness as separate from us was created at a particular moment in history from a culture 'whose relation to the land was already alienated' (p. 17).

Scholarship across the humanities and social sciences has challenged the notion of society and nature as non-overlapping domains of reality (see Braun and Castree 1998; Castree 2005; Davison 2008; Haraway 1991; Latour 1993; Macnaghten and Urry 1998; Plumwood 1993; Soper 1995; Williams 1972). A critical debate around the universal relevance of postmaterial values (Abramson 1997; Brechin and Krempton 1994; Dunlap and Mertig 1995, 1997; Inglehart 1997; Kidd and Lee

⁴From Dana Alston's speech at the People of Colour Environmental Leadership Summit held at Capitol Hill between Oct 24 and 27, 1991. Alston was one the key organisers of the summit

1997; Martinez-Alier 1995; Pierce 1997) has finally accepted that Southern varieties of environmentalisms exist and are distinct processes arising from different contexts to those of Northern environmentalisms (Brechin 1999).

Environmentalism now accepts within its discourses the concepts of intra-generational and inter-generational justice along with inter-species justice. It is now studied as a phenomenon that occurs across class, racial, and ethnic divides and as a movement whose actions can be motivated by a variety of imperatives from loss of community resources and ancestral lands, threat of toxic emissions, preserving biodiversity, or protecting future generations from the risk of climate change (O'Neill 2012).

2.3. Australian environmentalism

As in the United States, Australia's modern environment movement was shaped by the post-war economy's focus on resource-extraction and industrialisation that involved land clearing on a massive scale. Wilderness concerns dominated over other manifestations and discourses of environmentalism (Doyle 2000; Doyle and Kellow 1995; Eckersley 1992), and a large part of the environment movement practised a politics of conserving nature that the colonial settler society had still left untouched (Doyle 2000).

The 1980s were defined by the wilderness wars, a series of movements centred around stopping logging and dam building at forested sites that involved sustained protests and blockades at these remote locations. In Tasmania's southwest wilderness, seven years of campaigning to stop the damming of the Franklin River culminated in non-violent river blockades and the arrests of around 1300 protestors in 1983. The blockades, and a colour spread of an iconic photograph of a misty bend in the River in *The Age* newspaper, influenced voters ahead of the 1983 federal elections. The newly elected Prime Minister Bob Hawke suspended the Tasmanian government's hydroelectric project using the external affairs power of the Federal government.

The Franklin was a high profile campaign because of its publicity and the success in applying political pressure (Thompson 1984). It set a precedent for federal interference in development projects and was followed by other successful wilderness struggles in the 1980s and early 1990s such as in Queensland's wet tropics, Tasmania's southern forests, and the Kakadu wetlands in the Northern Territory (Toyne 1994). As a result of these wilderness campaigns, Prime Minister Bob Hawke's federal Labor government established these landscapes as World Heritage Areas, giving them protection under Australia's national parks system (Christoff 2016).

Grassroots mobilisations had started growing within the environment movement from the 1970s out of frustration at the bureaucratisation of big NGOs like Greenpeace and the Australian Conservation Foundation (Cianchi 2015). The success of the Franklin campaign was preceded by an unsuccessful Tasmanian grassroots movement to save Lake Pedder 'with a fringing beach of white quartzite sand', from being flooded for hydroelectricity in 1972 (Hay 1994, p. 5). Soon after the failure to save Lake Pedder, the world's first Green Party, the United Tasmania Group (UTG), was formed in 1972 to put wilderness protection on the political agenda⁵ (Rainbow 1992). In 1992, a national Greens confederation was instituted by uniting various state and territory sections that had formed since the 1980s. The Green Party regarded itself as forward looking, and transcended the traditional left-right divide by rejecting class struggle (Hillier 2010).

Across western democracies, modern environmentalism had formed as a new social movement in the late 1960s based on a shared a philosophy of protest, social action, and radical critique (Gottlieb 2005). However, although the Australian and German Green Parties were formed in a similar time period and shared a radical critique of capitalist ecological destruction, they demonstrated distinctly different political impulses. Doherty and Doyle (2007) differentiate the politics of the German and the Tasmanian Greens as 'post industrial with a new left-derived

⁵ The UTG's manifesto, *New Ethic* (1972), stated eight requirements for ethical and sustainable development to 'do minimum damage to the web of life of which we are a part' and 'maintain Tasmania's form and beauty not just for our enjoyment but the enjoyment of all future generations'.

analysis of power versus a postmaterialistic environmentalism prevalent in the minority countries of the new world' (p. 707).

While Naess and deep ecologists in the United States and Australia emphasised shifting people's values toward nature, Rudolph Bahro, the founding philosopher of the German Green Party, emphasised changing the patterns of production, consumption and distribution, and acknowledged the historic links between industrialisation, militarisation, and colonisation in creating the global ecological problem (Bahro 1982). Aiming for a radical reversal of the capitalist industrial system, the German Green Party adopted policies on wealth redistribution and anti-militarism (Guha 2000).

Despite diverse outlooks within the Australian Greens due to the diverse political evolutions of the various state units, its early approach was still dominated by a conservative eco-centrism, under the influence of the Tasmanian section. Conservative eco-centrism also found strong support from tertiary educated, left-of-centre, secular and dominantly urban Australians, who constituted the largest membership of Australian environmental nongovernmental organisations (ENGOS) (Crook and Pakulski 1995; Pakulski et al. 1998, Pakulski and Tranter 2004). The wilderness approach had a bearing on how society and the media categorised various environmental issues; while wildlife preservation and preventing logging were regarded as 'green' issues that environmentalists fought for, pollution and waste disposal were regarded as brown issues (Pakulski and Crook 1998).

Veteran environmentalist Dr Bob Brown, co-director of UTG and the first leader of the Australian Greens, attempted to unite diverse values within the party through an anti-consumption political narrative:

The global ecological crisis unleashed by capitalism and the political vacuum created by the Australian Labor Party's embracing of economic rationalism made the rise of a Green Party inevitable ... like spontaneous combustion from the rotting haystack of an overblown consumerist society

(Brown and Singer 1996, p. 20)

Australia felt the global influences of the anti-nuclear and peace movements in the late 1970s through mass mobilisations in cities by grassroots organisations such as Friends of the Earth (Martin 1982). Due to these and internal influences from its left-leaning Western Australian and New South Wales sections, some of the Australian Green's ideologies resonated with its German counterpart. Beyond this, the understanding of environmental processes, political histories and geographical specificities that underpinned efforts at political change, differed between Europe and America (Guha 1989b, 2000) and by extension Australia.

The Greens and the environment movement did not become a working person's movement. However tactical alliances were built with the union movement such as when a relatively socially aware labour movement became active on the anti-nuclear campaign, leading to an alignment between the environment and labour movements (Martin 1980). The Green Bans movement that started in Sydney within the Australian Builders' Labourers' Federation (ABLF) in the 1970s, set a global precedent for progressive unionism on ecological issues by refusing to work on building projects that harmed environmental and cultural heritage. Under trade unionist Jack Munday's leadership, Green Bans collaborated with resident action groups against destructive local developments and built a grand coalition that cut across the class divide, and traditional antagonism between environmentalists and workers (Burgmann 2008).

The environment movement's fixed ontology and antagonistic legacy made collaborations challenging (Pickerill 2018). The antagonism between farmers and environmentalists owing to fundamental differences in values, beliefs, motivations and worldviews, is well regarded (Brummans et al. 2008). The Land Care movement that started in 1989, was a collaboration between the national ENGO Australian Conservation Foundation and the peak farming body National Farmers Federation. Regarded as 'one of the best national examples of rural partnerships and group formation' (Pretty et al. 2010, p. 278), Land Care proved an exception to the antagonism in farmer-ENGO relations in Australia. It was made possible by

politically acceptable framings of natural resource management for farmers, such as self-reliance and participation (Lockie 2004).

Owing to settler colonialism and the creation of new meaning in landscapes from where Indigenous presence has been removed, American and Australian environmentalism faced comparable challenges towards reconciling eco-centricity with Indigenous land rights and economic justice. The entry of the *Native Title Act 1993* (NTA) into Australia's legal system stimulated inclusiveness towards Indigenous claims to country in the approaches of environmental groups. Although officially Indigenous groups have the same access to formal structures of democracy as non-Indigenous Australians, a small and highly dispersed population means they have little electoral power and few options for political action, except via the 'language and discourse of white liberal democracy' (Zappala and Sawer 2001, p. 290). In cases of contesting mainstream development, Indigenous groups have either mobilised civil society and public opinion or appealed to the international rights standards of prior and informed consent (Altman 2012a).

In the 1990s, public awareness of Indigenous land rights contributed to the success of the Jabiluka Action Group against uranium mining on the lands of the Mirrar people, adjacent to the Kakadu National Park in the Northern Territory (Hintjens 2000). By withholding free prior and informed consent enshrined in the United Nations Declaration of the Rights of Indigenous People (UNDRIP), Australia's native title system had limited Aboriginal people's say on what happens on their land, often compelling them to enter into contractual alliances with environmentalists to further land rights against the state-corporate compact (Vincent 2016). Indigenous-green relations posed the question of how to build an equitable and sustainable system by respecting sovereignty as enshrined in the UNDRIP (Esposito and Neale 2016).

For Indigenous groups, the need to collaborate with environmentalists was driven by their own limitations in resources and legislative capacities. On losing their native title claim over the Barmah-Millewa River Redgum forests at the Victoria-

New South Wales border in 1998⁶, the Yorta-Yorta people formed an alliance with Friends of the Earth to campaign for a jointly managed National Park (Atkinson 2004). Between the 1970s and 1990s, environmental groups forged proximal but unstable tactical alliances with Indigenous groups in places with strong Indigenous presence and continuing traditional practices (Vincent and Neale 2016). Green-Black alliances sought to navigate their differences through collaborations, informal agreements and negotiations at multiple scales and complexities that the public narratives of prominent ENGOs failed to reflect (Christoff 2016).

Since environmentalism's collaborations with Indigenous land management in Australia have occurred within regulatory contexts that are geographically specific, they have produced unique definitions and environmental co-management methods. However, owing to a 'colonial paternal sense of responsibility' and 'unexamined social norm', collaborations between natural resource managers or environmentalists and Indigenous groups often created dualisms that denied commonality and created tensions (Weir 2016, p. 137).

Australia's water management culture forced Indigenous people into either co-option or marginalisation on account of Indigenous knowledge being deemed traditional, local, spiritual, emotional and culturally specific as opposed to Western conservation science, which was deemed modern, universal, technical, rational, and culturally neutral (Plumwood 2002). Attempts at conserving entire catchments in the manner of national parks in Queensland through the controversial *Wild River Act's 2005* clashed with priorities of land-use for economic development on Aboriginal-owned land, disrupting long-term relations between the Cape York Land Council and ENGOs (Neale 2016).

The bias and marginalisation inherent in such conceptual frames needed to be countered through a 'double movement' or a gesture both of solidarity and the other's difference as an entity to be engaged on their own terms (Plumwood 2002, p.138). Indigenous-environmentalist alliances needed to overcome the

⁶ A 1998 Federal court judgement had denied the Yorta-Yorta people's native title claim on the grounds of a perceived loss of tradition (Atkinson 2004).

problematic rhetoric of Black versus green, of environment versus economy, and of green colonialism versus Indigenous autonomy (Pickerill 2018). Most of the Indigenous-green interactions between the 1970s and 1990s indicated a fundamental mismatch of visions (Dodson 1997).

From the 1990s, the need to accept climate change has forced Australia's environment movement to reconsider the simple binary of its narrative, of nature as either pristine or transformed. At the same time, the emergence of the native title system and the beginning of the process of returning Indigenous lands since 1993, has given Aboriginal Australians a voice on the issue of mining-related environmental conflicts, and compelled environmentalist's narratives to reflect a pragmatic approach. Together, these two factors have set a future framework for Australian environmentalism after the era of the wilderness wars (Christoff 2016).

2.4. Indian environmentalism

Although currents such as wildlife conservation (Lele 2012) and middle-class appreciation of the aesthetics of national parks (Baviskar 2002; Saberwal et al. 2001; Mawdsley 2004) also characterise Indian environmentalism, most environmentalists subscribe to the environmentalism of the poor in the Indian context (Mawdsley 2006). Scholars of Indian environmentalism mostly draw from a combination of the Gandhian vision for alternative development based on the idea of self-sufficient villages (Gandhi 1937)⁷ and critiques of industrialisation and global anti-development discourses (Escobar 1995, 2001).

In the context of India's postcolonial development in a highly unequal society, environmental injustice pertains to unequal access to a shrinking pool of natural resources by nature-dependent subsistence communities, whom Dassman (1988)

⁷According to the Gandhian vision, *Gram Swarajya* ('self sufficient villages') would be achieved through building cottages from locally sourced materials, providing sufficient village commons for the grazing of cattle, locally available education, and local governance through *Panchayats* ('village councils'). The model villages would also grow their own food, and make their own hand-spun *khaadi* cotton cloth (Gandhi 1937). This vision was borne out of Gandhi's critique of industrial development: 'the blood that is today inflating the arteries of the cities runs once again in the blood vessels of the villages.' (Gandhi 1946).

called the ecosystem people. Agarwal (1986) argues that as the sections of society most affected by disruptive development, the primary concern of peasants, women and India's Indigenous Adivasi ('native dweller') communities is that they should benefit from environmental resources. Guha (2000) argues that struggles of marginalised groups are often marked by a powerful indigenous ideology of social justice. Such struggles employ tactics of peasant resistance – strikes, road blockades, protest marches and hunger strikes (Spodek 1971), collectively termed as 'weapons of the weak' (Scott 1985).

Political ecology in India has revolved around the use and control of natural resources by different groups. The New Delhi-based Centre for Science and Environment's (CSE) *State of the Environment* reports (1983, 1985) highlighted that the overexploitation of resources by commercial interests was creating a disproportionate burden on ecological communities. Guha (2000) considers this to be the fundamental claim of the environmentalism of the poor in India. With political parties being largely indifferent to environmental destruction and its social consequences, civil society groups built non-party political formations to organise ecological refugees (Kothari 1984). The environmentalism of the poor, India's dominant environmentalism, has been conceptualised and articulated on the basis of such practices.

Chipko Aandolan, a social movement of peasant communities formed in the Himalayas in the 1970s, is considered the starting point of India's modern environment movement (Guha 1989a). *Chipko* ('to hug') became the definitive word for the movement when in a critical moment in the struggle village women hugged trees to prevent contractors from logging them. The standoff between the state and villagers forced a community-oriented forest management plan for the region. Whether ecological protection was implicit or incidental to Chipko has been much debated. Guha (1989, 1989a) has argued that since the imperative for the standoff was their being denied a fair share of forest resources, protection of catchments and forests were a consequence rather than explicit objectives of the struggle. Shiva (1988) has contended, however, that the politics of the Chipko movement reflects the long held knowledge of village women – 'that forests

sustain the earth and all she bears' – making it an explicitly ecological and feminist movement (p. 76).

Chipko was one piece in an entire landscape of resistance in post-independence India: consisting of peasants and Adivasi people opposing displacements from large dams; artisanal fishers resisting trawler fishing, resistance to commercial forestry activities; and downstream peasants and fishers opposing upstream industrial pollution (Agarwal 1984; Gadgil and Guha 1995). From the 1980s, as the Indian government's plans to generate large-scale hydroelectricity to power the industries of the postcolonial economy started taking effect, various organised but mutually disconnected oppositions to large dams erupted across the Indian landscape alongside movements of dam-displaced-people for rehabilitation and compensation (CSE 1985; Fernandes and Ganguly-Thukral 1988; Ganguly-Thukral 1992; Gadgil and Guha 1995), as the Indian government's plans to generate large-scale hydroelectricity to power the industries of the postcolonial economy started taking effect.

The Narmada Bachao Aandolan (NBA), India's largest anti-dam movement was formed in the 1980s. It challenged the drowning of lands and displacement of communities in 193 villages in central India. Called the world's greatest planned environmental disaster, the World Bank-funded Sardar Sarovar hydroelectricity scheme proposed 30 major dams, 135 medium and 3000 minor dams along the Narmada River (Kalpavriksh 1988). Adivasi people were most affected by this grand dam scheme that commenced in 1979. The NBA spread across multiple states. It received support from movements and networks across India as well as international NGOs due to the involvement of the World Bank (Baviskar 1995). The movement faced repression from governments and was accused of being anti-development. Urban activists leading the movement were accused of wishing to 'keep poor farmers and Adivasis in hunger, illiteracy and nakedness by denying them the fruits of development' which they themselves enjoyed (Anklesaria 1988).

Urban-based activist groups sought to democratise India's development process to make it sustainable and equitable for rural-based livelihood communities who had

no legal rights to challenge the effects of industrialisation on their lands and livelihoods. In 1985, a joint statement from civil society organisations appealing for the participation of livelihood communities in the state's resource management process, reflected the political impulse to democratise development:

Today, with no participation of the common people in the management of local resources, even the poor have become so marginalised...that they are ready to discount their future and sell away the remaining natural resource for a pittance...Given the changed socio-economic circumstances and greater pressure on natural resources, new community control systems have to be established that are more highly integrated, scientifically sophisticated, equitable and sustainable

(joint statement cited in Guha 2000, p. 67)

The vision of Indian environmentalism made ecological and social harmony contingent on the creation of an economically just society (Gadgil and Guha 1995). Its political approach called for a rethinking of development based on a democratisation of natural resources and the environment (Guha 2000). Its narratives attempted to widen the development debate beyond conventional economics towards inclusivity for ecosystem and livelihood dependent communities (Kothari and Parajuli 1993).

The political impulse for democratisation in the Southern context was further evident in the transformations of ecological thought in India. In *An Indian Conservation Strategy* (1982), ecologist Madhav Rao Gadgil criticised the paradigm of international scientific conservation – the big continuous wilderness, and a 'hands off nature', 'keystone species' approach to biodiversity protection – and emphasised a decentralised network of small parks as a suitable model for India's peopled natural landscapes. In 1987, Gadgil spearheaded the Save the Western Ghats movement along the ecologically sensitive western rim of the Indian peninsula, with the twin objectives of ecological conservation and equitable access for communities (Guha 2006).

The striving for democracy has thus assumed entirely different purposes in environmentalism's Northern versus Southern contexts. While the wilderness wars in Australia and American radical environmentalism sought democratic representation for the rights of nature, livelihood movements in India appealed for a human-centric justice in the distribution of natural resources by the state. On account of differences in historical contexts, political and economic realities of industrialising and industrialised nations, and effects of environmental destruction on densely populated Southern geographies such as India, the environmentalism of the poor also differed in degrees from Indigenous land rights struggles in Australia and the environmental justice movement in the United States. Collectively, the lived relationships of India's subsistence communities with nature had the twin effects of reconfiguring concepts from both Northern conservation and Northern environmental justice, even though it shared with the latter the principle of social equity as the foundation for ecological justice.

The environmentalism of the poor's ideological formulations have been critiqued on several grounds. New traditionalist discourses of environmentalism of the poor have characterised colonial rule as having introduced alien social, economic and ecological relations that have continued in postcolonial India (see for example, Gadgil and Guha 1993; Shiva 1988). Such accounts made generalised assertions about the inherent conservation ethic of women and Adivasis (Shiva 1988; Banuri and Marglin 1993; Pereira and Seabrook 1992) and deployed what Brosius (1999) called 'essentialised images'.

Instead of a historical validity of traditional environmental and gender relations, Vandana Shiva's ecofeminist writings indicate an ideological partiality towards a mostly Hindu way of life in the pre-colonial rural India (Mawdsley 1998; Rangan 2000; Sinha et al 1997), while ignoring the reality of the harshness of everyday life in the village (Mawdsley 2006). A rising Indian middle class is also unlikely to find political action in an idealised rural past (Sridhar 2010).

Other criticisms of Southern environmentalist writings relate to the local focus of political ecological studies. Scholarly examinations of livelihood movements in the

Global South have paid less attention to the political ecology of global issues as seen from a third-world perspective (Adger et al. 2001; Moore et al. 1996).

Another related criticism is that with the exception of the state, political ecological studies in the South have not considered the role of non-local actors (Bryant and Bailey 1997). For example, the role of non-governmental organisations (NGOs) remains a much-needed area of study in third-world political ecology (Bryant 1998). Collaborations between grassroots movements and civil society NGOs in India have created an overlap of what used to be previously considered as distinct categories of social action, requiring a conceptual framework that can accommodate multiple claims as well as contradictory politics at sites of environmental conflict (Baviskar 1997; Nambiar 2014).

However, despite the pertinent criticism of political ecology's focus and representations in Indian studies, its role in highlighting the centrality of the state in both creating and resolving environmental injustices makes it a necessary approach for studying environmental conflicts in the Southern context. The environmentalism of the poor in India has been both defined and challenged by the developmental paradigm of the state. Its narratives have asserted that the post-independence developmental state has continued to exclude the environmental knowledge of Adivasis, much like its colonial predecessor (Gadgil and Guha 1993).

The environmentalism of the poor has retained a suspicion of the state, even in the post-independence era, because the Indian government has continued to use colonial era land and forest laws and perpetuate the maldistribution of ecological resources. An analysis of the contradictions of the postcolonial developmental state is therefore central to understanding how movements frame environmental conflicts in India. Apart from the obvious differences in history, culture and public discourse, the centrality of the state's role in shaping movements is one of the fundamental differences between the Southern and Northern contexts of environmentalism (Williams and Mawdsley 2006).

2.5. Environmentalism's divisions and common ground in the climate era

The issue of climate change has contributed to making the environment a truly global issue spanning global politics, regulations and movements (Dryzek 2013). Further, the asymmetries of cause and effect in climate change directly reflect global developmental divides, making the question of how to address climate change unalterably a question of justice (Goodman 2009). The issue of global warming has generated new North-South contestations over environmental justice, particularly in relation to responsibility sharing over green house gas (GHG) emissions. Although environmental and climate NGOs from the South have also paid considerable attention to concerns about sharing the burden of emissions and about global economic justice for the South, the epicentre of these North-South contestation has largely been the international climate talks.

But for the various environmentalisms discussed in the earlier sections, climate change also created opportunities for environmentalisms to find common cause on a global environmental challenge. A possibility for common ground was particularly enhanced owing to Northern environmentalism having to come face to face with the social impacts of industrialism that are now writ large on account of global warming.

2.5.1 Carbon emissions, equity, and the North-South divide

Issues of equity and historic responsibility on the issue of climate change have added new dimensions to the North-South divide in environmentalism. One of most critical concerns from the South has been the North's lack of consideration for social equity and historic injustice in attributing responsibility for carbon emissions. Agarwal and Narain (1991), Meyer-Abich (1993), Mukherjee (1992) and Sachs (1993) have exposed the politics of blame and agenda setting surrounding the global warming problem and the promotion of first-world controlled environmental management mechanisms as its global solutions. The Rio Earth Summit in 1992, when the United Nations Framework Convention on

Climate Change (UNFCCC) that formed the basis for all future climate negotiations was adopted, proved a flash point on the issue of environmental responsibilities across the North-South divide⁸ (Rolston 1995).

In the lead up to Rio, a World Resource Institute (WRI 1990) ranking of the carbon emissions of countries was criticised by Southern groups for ignoring the historic responsibility and 'gargantuan consumption' of developed countries, particularly the United States, for causing global warming. The Centre for Science and Environment's (CSE) report *Global Warming in an Unequal World; A Case of Environmental Colonialism* (Agarwal and Narayan 1991, 2012) challenged the WRI's approach, which equated methane emissions from the livestock and paddy fields of subsistence farmers to emissions from gas-guzzling automobiles, on the grounds of justice and morality, distinguishing between the subsistence emissions of the poor and lifestyle emissions of the rich.

In a similar vein to other contentions across environmentalism's global divide, such as between Southern overpopulation (see Ehrlich 1968) and Northern overconsumption (see Galbraith 1958; Guha 1989b), the WRI (1990) report and CSE's response sparked a vigorous debate over the carbon footprints of the rich versus poor, equitable distribution of carbon space between the North and South, and between the ethics of calculating aggregate country level and per capita green house gas (GHG) emissions⁹.

Southern concerns over global equity in climate responsibility were incorporated into the UNFCCC through the Common But Differentiated Responsibility and Respective Capability (CBDR&RC) Principle under article 3.1 in the Convention (Raghuandan 2019). The principle of common but differentiated responsibilities (CBDR) acknowledges the deep inequalities between, and the different priorities

⁸ The debates were characterised by contentions around the issues of the developmental rights of Southern nations versus the responsibilities of the North, overpopulation in the South versus overconsumption in the North, and between public and private interests (Rolston 1995).

⁹ While the WRI warned that if just China and India increased emissions to the global average per capita rate, the earth's net greenhouse gas levels would rise by 28%, the CSE argued, based on principles of sustainable development, that the remaining 'global atmospheric common' be shared equally on a per capita basis.

of, developed and developing countries, bringing a nuanced approach to international environmental initiatives (Beyerlin and Marauhn 2011). The Preamble to the 1992 UNFCCC acknowledged the historical contribution to GHG gases by developed economies, and the critical need for economic growth and poverty eradication in developing countries (UNFCCC 1992).

However, from the beginning of climate negotiations under the UNFCCC, a global divide has persisted over the nature of commitments from developing countries, and the financial and technical support for them from developed countries (Dasgupta 2012, 2019). Overall, three approaches towards responsibility for emissions – the national, historic and per capita – have remained as bones of contention between the North and South, and contributed to an impasse in climate negotiations (Dubash and Rajamani 2010).

By the mid-2000s, on account of rapidly growing emissions of emerging major economies, particularly China and India, Northern economies including the USA and Australia refused binding GHG reduction targets without commitments from the South. Separate from the power dynamics of big economies in the North and South, due to the growing demands for climate responsibility from vulnerable small island nations along with the disproportionate impacts of global warming on the global poor, the per-capita framework had begun to look more like a fig leaf than an instrument for genuine equity and global social justice. The UNFCCC framework of equity through the CBDR&RC principle was replaced by the time of the Paris Agreement, which reflected a symmetric treatment of all parties (Kanitkar and Jayaraman 2019).

The ongoing redistributive justice controversy between developed and developing countries – that developed countries should provide climate finance and technical support for developing countries to transform their economies to low carbon and adapt to climate change – remained unresolved after the Paris Climate Summit in 2015. The Paris Agreement did not set a roadmap for an adequate funding would be provided to developing countries, or formal targets for Northern countries'

financial contributions through the mechanism of the Green Climate Fund (GCF) (Roberts and Weikmans 2015).

The issue of emissions reductions and how emissions are counted has spanned a long period of tensions between the assertions for economic justice from the developing South and the articulations of convenience (and protection of vested interests) from the North. Unfortunately, this climate dispute between the North and the South has masked critical questions that need to be raised about the effects of climate change on vulnerable communities and the large global poor in the South. Such questions have been extensively raised outside the formal processes and negotiating structures of the international climate convention, through global networks for climate justice.

2.5.2. Varieties of climate justice

Outside of formalised international climate negotiations under the UNFCCC, activist networks for climate action and climate justice have articulated different yet overlapping narratives around why the world needs collective and effective action for a safe climate. The emergence of climate change as a global issue has created new meanings for the actions and politics of various modes of environmental resistance – Northern environmentalism, the environment justice movement and indigenous movements in the Global North, and the environmentalism of the poor in the South.

The nature of the effects of climate change, which can be felt both globally and locally, has made it imperative that the politics of those who grapple with the big picture find alignment with the activisms for human injustices of marginalised communities (Purdy 2015). Simultaneously, since the interconnections between colonialism, capitalism and environmental degradation, and their underlying role in creating and driving climate change are now well regarded, it is imperative to have new conversation about time, and place, and what constitutes meaningful political action (Birch 2016; Bird Rose 2013).

The intertwining of human and environmental fates due to climate change has generated an opportunity for wilderness-centric environmentalism to go beyond its past legacy and to address a contradiction that even while it focused on worldwide problems, wilderness-centricity brought to environmental politics the ‘cultural habits of a much more parochial, and sometimes nastier, movement’ (Purdy 2015, p. 15). The realities of the present era have raised hopes for the democratisation of Northern environmentalism towards an inclusive and aligned narrative and politics with other environment-related struggles.

For communities that have historically survived environmental injustice, climate change implies yet another set of anthropogenic ecological disruptions they have had no role in creating, and yet, for which they will once again bear a disproportionate burden (Gottlieb 2005). For such communities, the impacts of climate change are not just the global risks of rising temperatures, floods and droughts that have started to occur today, but also the risks of being poisoned, sickened, exploited and abused, which they have historically faced (Quinn-Thibodeau and Wu 2017).

Climate change has therefore compounded the significance of their historic resistance and compelled them to go beyond their local outlook. While continuing to aim for justice, empowerment and accountability as before, the environment justice movement has now gone truly global through the climate justice movement (Dryzek 2013; Gottlieb 2005). Environmental justice and climate justice have been articulated in new social justice upsurges such as the Black Lives Matter (BLM) movement, which, among other pursuits, has pointed to the disproportionate concentration of incinerators and waste facilities in poor, non-white neighbourhoods and called for divesting from fossil fuels (Purdy 2016).

Indigenous perspectives on climate justice enfold a further distinction. For Indigenous people, the present risk of climate change evokes past injustices of colonial dispossession and cultural disruption¹⁰. Climate justice has therefore

¹⁰ ‘Climate change is yet another rapid assault on our way of life. It cannot be separated from the first waves of changes and assaults at the very core of the human spirit that has come our way’, Sheila Watt-Cloutier, interviewed by the *Ottawa Citizen* (Robb 2015).

become an umbrella issue under which they can articulate many environmental injustices (Whyte 2017). Due to historical injustice, indigenous climate justice is also intricately linked to notions of sovereignty; movements for indigenous environmental justice have therefore remained centred around land rights as before. In Australia, for example, Seed, the indigenous youth coalition that has 'taken the environmental agenda and built it into their worldview', advocates for the deepening and broadening of the past legacy of indigenous environmental justice (Esposito and Neale 2016).

From the perspective of Indigenous rights movements, the democratising of Northern wilderness-centric wilderness in the climate era needs to also reflect a decolonisation of solidarity by removing the 'paternalism and tension in relations between non-indigenous and indigenous activists' that are fundamentally a product of the colonial condition (Land 2015).

The economic, social and cultural displacement of vulnerable communities would continue to worsen under climate change, exacerbating what Nixon (2011) calls the slow violence of the poor. Based on this understanding, the interpretation of the climate problem by Southern civil society groups remained grounded in the fundamental principles of equity and justice (Lele 2012). In India, the issue of climate change had long remained the domain of a few elite policy and science based NGOs and foreign policy experts (Dubash 2012). However the activism of grassroots science and climate justice groups and transnational organisations such as Greenpeace, has been instrumental in not only turning the spotlight of climate responsibility inward towards India's highly unequal society and the disproportionate burden of climate change on the poor, but also calling for intra-generational equity for the poor (Dubash 2013; Thaker and Leiserowitz 2014).

Such activism has criticised the government's developmental frame, which while seeking equity on the global stage, has continued to play on the domestic divisions between the urban rich by hiding their emissions behind the negligible carbon footprint of the rural poor (Adve 2007, 2013; Adve and Engineer 2010; Ananthapanmanabhan et al. 2007). The issue of climate change has created opportunities for Indian civil society organisations (CSOs), which are largely

urban-based, to extend their actions to help vulnerable communities, which are largely subsistence based, in adaptation, mitigation and climate-related development measures. But broadly speaking, the Indian CSO network does not use climate change as an overarching frame for a range of eco-social issues, conflicts and actions in India. Swarnakar (2019) argues that the network lacks a grand narrative on climate justice due its contradictory political outlook on who needs to take responsibility for climate action; while parts of the network hold the Global North accountable for climate injustice and other parts blaming the Indian state

Finally, with regards to the environmentalism of the poor, climate change has not generated mass mobilisations. However, energy projects such as coalmining and thermal power generation have continued to generate discontent amongst peasant and indigenous communities. These have been challenged by the environmentalisms of the poor in response to the loss of their lands and livelihoods, environmental pollution around the project sites and unfair state compensations. Environmentalisms of the poor against such industrial developments have increased in India's neoliberal era of rapid development (Roy and Schaffartzik 2021).

2.5.3. Climate justice as a common frame?

Two intersecting lines of arguments have been made around why climate justice can hold a dialogic umbrella over various claims to ecological and social justice today. The first argument relates to the advancing climate crisis, due to which other frameworks for eco-social justice are now understood as subsumed by climate imperatives, to produce the climate justice model (Goodman 2009). Klein sees climate change as the all-encompassing 'human rights struggle of our time' that requires its many movements to be connected (cited in Stephenson 2015, p. 52). The second is on account of the reconfiguration of the significance and politics of various modes of environmental resistances through the notion of climate justice, as discussed in the previous subsection.

The nature and scale of the problem of climate change made it imperative for wilderness-centric Northern environmentalism to transform its fixed ontology and exclusionary approach towards other human-nature relations, expressed by other modes of environmental resistances. In the North, movements challenging environmental injustices on vulnerable communities, as well as movements for Indigenous justice have taken climate justice as a higher organising frame for present and historic grievances, thus creating a continuous and deeper significance for their politics and actions.

The climate era is understood to hold the possibility of enmeshing various environmentalisms to create an inclusive ecological justice and an intersectional politics that is less like (Northern) environmentalism in the previous era and more like human rights, since 'what we are fighting for is each other' (Stephenson 2015, p. xv). It stands acknowledged that in order to achieve this necessary intersectionality, eco-centric environmentalism will have to decolonise its engagement and establish solidarity with the purpose and vision of movements that are fighting to redress historic injustices. Towards this end, Klein (2016) sees the task of the climate activist as 'overcoming the various disconnections and connecting our various movements'.

However, these possibilities for intersectionality and the notion of climate justice as a common frame have emerged from the global North, and they are indicative of a new relational politics and new approaches to engagements between the various concepts and politics of environmental resistances in the North, such as eco-centrism, environmental justice, and Indigenous justice. They do not represent the socio-political context of environmentalism in the Global South. As the previous subsection indicates, despite the centrality of the environment in their lives, climate justice has not become a mobilising factor for the environmentalism of the Southern poor, such as in the case of India.

Although climate change has engaged urban-based civil society groups in India that are constituted of the well-educated middle class, it has not generated mass environmental movements of the largely rural poor, signifying a highly uneven

public sphere and a fragmented society. This obstructs the global narrative of climate justice from being adopted by ecosystems-dependent communities that are the most susceptible to climate change, thereby creating a paradox. Williams and Mawdsley (2006) argue that despite similar patterns of structural marginalisations (along race and class in the United States, and caste, ethnicity, class and gender in India) that cause environmental ills and spark environment justice movements in Northern and Southern contexts, the socio-political contexts of environment justice movements still differ across the North and South in three major ways that I now discuss. The differences can be experienced even in the case of democracies.

Williams and Mawdsley's (2006) first argument is that even marginalised communities in the North can experience a relatively homogenous public sphere and thus access comparatively effective mechanisms for justice as opposed to their Southern counterparts. In the Southern postcolonial context such as in India, the presence of what Rudolph and Rudolph (1987) characterise as a weak-strong state, creates ambitious yet incompletely realised government programs for public good across various areas, including in participatory environmental management and environmental policy. These, coupled with a lack of enforcement of legislative rights of subsistence communities, including towards consent for mining on their lands, have created a systematic lack of recognition of 'ecosystems people' within governance systems. This inequality of recognition makes the non-discursive struggles of 'subaltern counterpublics' (Fraser 1997, p. 81), which fall outside the formal structures of states and institutions, a crucial factor in the process of deliberative democracy for environmental justice in the South (Williams and Mawdsley 2006). Although marginalised communities in the North also experience challenges in accessing rights and justice, such as ongoing experiences of denial of sovereign rights amongst Indigenous Australians (see Moreton-Robinson 2017), the combined realities of poverty and everyday violence from developmental states experienced by Southern subalterns such as Adivasis, including torture and killing (see Baviskar 2012), can make the scale of their structural and procedural injustices incomparable with Northern subalterns.

Second, people's struggles for environmental justice in India have to contend with a highly unequal public sphere that is dominated by the urban-based middle class that is largely responsible for the visibility of the environmentalism of the poor, as well as for how they are represented. This mediated representation both risks their essentialisation, as reflected in political ecological texts on livelihood struggles discussed earlier, as well as a critical 'othering', as seen in the representation of Adivasi protestors in the Narmada Bachchi Aandolan (NBA) as the semi-naked, illiterate, and starving masses who need to be saved by development, by pro-dam groups and by the media (Anklesaria 1988).

How Western environment justice research contextualises Southern actors has further bearing on the challenge of accurate representation for the environmentalism of the poor. Williams and Mawdsley (2006) argue that what David Harvey characterises as a 'sideways looking admiration for those marginalised peoples who have not yet been fully brought within the global political economy of technologically advanced and bureaucratically rationalized capitalism' (Harvey 1996, p. 389), can risk using Southern environmental actors as symbols of distant 'others' within frames of Northern environmental justice, without reflecting the complexity of their contextual realities. Therefore, applying the common lens of climate justice should be accompanied by a critical engagement with contextual differences of various modes of environmental resistances. Climate justice as an organising plank for multiple grievances can however help to globalise the significance of local livelihood resistances of the environmentalism of the Southern poor.

This is especially important given the third factor, which is that the environment makes a direct contribution to the lives and livelihoods of a large section of the population in the South, bringing urgency to the environment versus development debate in the Southern context. Even in the era of climate change, the environmentalism of the poor in India has continued to express grievances about the loss of lands and destruction of livelihoods from large-scale industrialisation. Williams and Mawdsley (2006) argue that it is not enough to simply see how ideas of justice coming from the South may tactically align themselves within a 'global'

environmental justice movement that is framed by Northern contexts; rather distinct frames of environmental justice emerging from the South should be treated as such in Western environmental justice research.

2.6. Analytical themes from the literature review

This thesis is based on two in-depth ethnographic investigations of anti-coal activism in Australia and India. The inquiry focuses on how activism has changed from their earlier aspects that are discussed in sections 2.3 and 2.4. The review of Australian environmentalism in section 2.3 identifies the need for environmental activism to move towards a pragmatic approach and build shared politics and narratives with other actors. The Australian case study in this thesis analyses the shared narratives and politics of environmental activism during the resource boom, and how it has been transformed through these. The review of Indian environmentalism identifies the central role of the state in alleviating or exacerbating environmental injustice for the Indian poor, and a distinct lack of rights of communities to participate in decision making on natural resource management and industrial development that directly impacts their lives and livelihoods. The Indian case study in this thesis analyses how a new language of rights over forest and lands is changing the discourse of the environmentalism of the poor today, and what role the neoliberal Indian state plays in producing environmental injustice towards subsistence based communities.

The structure of the two case studies – in Chapters 3,4, and 5 for India and 6,7 and 8 for Australia – is designed to understand how the changing role of states and the changing political economies in these respective countries changed environmental activism, based on an understanding of the central role of the state in alleviating or exacerbating environmental injustice, as noted particularly in the discussion on Indian environmentalism in section 2.4. The two anti-coal activisms specifically investigate how the state-corporation nexus in coal (or crony-capitalism in the Indian context) is deepening environmental destruction and conflicts, how the two activisms challenge the entrenched power of coal in politics, and how governments respond.

The case studies of anti-coal activism in Australia and India investigate the themes emerging from section 2.5, around the common ground and differences in Northern and Southern perspectives of environmental and climate justice in the present era. As noted, while climate justice can act as a unifying frame for various assertions of justice in the Northern context, in the Southern case such as in India, the issue of climate change is not driving movement mobilisations. The case studies investigate how the respective anti-coal activism link (or do not link) the issue of coal extraction and climate justice.

Since 'we are all in this together now, and the role of the climate activist is to 'tie the various threads and disconnections together', the purpose of the thesis is both to identify whether this intersectionality is being achieved between environmental activism with various other justice concerns within the same geography, and whether points of convergence are emerging between historically disparate environmentalisms across the North and the South, through the common approach of resisting coal extraction.

Chapter 9, the Analysis, addresses how common ground can be achieved between the disparities of Northern and Southern contexts and narratives of anti-coal activism today, as demonstrated through the case studies. A strong emphasis of human rights and Indigenous land justice in a global outlook of climate justice, as also noted in section 2.5 in this chapter, provide directions for comparing the anti-coal activism, their narratives and politics, in India and Australia. Human rights and land justice, strongly articulated in both Indian and Australian anti-coal activism, generate common ground across Northern and Southern disparities.

2.7. Conclusion

Through an investigation of environmental activism generated from coal mining-related conflicts in Australia and India, this thesis raises questions about the historic divide between environmentalism, not only across the North and South, but also within eco-centric and human-centric forms of environmental justice in

the North, and whether they can find common ground today. Climate change has brought intimations of an end to the kind of nature that eco-centric Northern environmentalism has striven to preserve – a nature that was unharmed by human intervention – making it imperative to transform from the simple binary of a human-nature divide in its vision towards a democratic and inclusive politics. The concepts, politics and visions of environment justice and Indigenous justice movements in the Global North, while retaining the need for historic and structural justice, have been globalised through the adoption of the climate justice narrative. Through critical reflections of its own legacy and a dialectical process of attempting to achieve shared ground, such as in the case of Australian environmentalism's efforts to secure Green-Black relations, Northern eco-centric and historic human-centric environmental justice movements have by now negotiated some shared principles – decolonising solidarity; acknowledging the inter-connections between colonialism and capitalism; and addressing the historic dispossession of Indigenous peoples in settler colonial society. These principles form the basis for a common understanding of climate justice.

However the division across the contextual realities in the Global North and South remains significant, and it is a crucial factor in environmentalism's North-South divide. As seen in the case of the environmentalism of the poor in India, climate change has not become an issue of mass mobilisations for livelihood communities, despite their high-level of dependency on nature, creating a paradoxical situation. The high-level of dependency on nature by a significant part of the Indian population adds a critical urgency to the environmental assertions of livelihood movements. Despite this urgency, their contestations largely fall outside the formal discursive field due to the nature and functioning of the postcolonial state and its ineffective implementation of rights and institutional representation for vulnerable communities. Livelihood movements also struggle for representation in the public sphere that is dominated by the middle class.

Frameworks of climate justice emerging from the North need to recognise this Southern paradox. Instead of merely seeking to align Southern ideas of justice within its framework and treating Southern environmental actors as distant

'others', Western environmental justice research needs to not only include the critical distinctions arising from Southern contexts, but also fully contextualise Southern actors. This imperative informs the comparative purpose and approach of this thesis. Through a critical comparison of two collective environmental resistances to coal mining in Australia and India, it responds to questions about environmentalism's historic North-South divide, about how these differences could be resolved with the common focus on climate justice, what critical differences still remain, and what possibilities for common ground emerge in the present era.

Chapter 3

Environmentalism of the poor in neoliberal India

3.1. Introduction

Owing to the centrality of the state in shaping the environmentalism of the poor, a discussion on the contradictions of India's postcolonial developmental state is central to understanding the nature of India's environmental conflicts and mass environmental movements. The Greenpeace-Mahan anti-coal movement emerged out of specific political and economic contexts around coal mining in central India that I discuss in the next chapter. At the same time it was also one of the many resistances to industrial projects in the neoliberal era that faced similar primary risks of land evictions and livelihoods losses, used similar grassroots tactics, and sought similar legal recourse for justice.

This chapter analyses the state's role in shaping today's environmentalism of the poor through two approaches. The historical approach discusses how India's postcolonial state has changed from the previous socialist era to the present neoliberal era. The contextual approach discusses how today's people's movements on environmental issues arise from the contradictions of the Indian state under neoliberalism. The difference between yesterday's and today's environmentalism of the poor, and yesterday's and today's postcolonial Indian state, constitutes the entire context – historical, political, economic and social – from which the Mahan movement arises.

Section 3.2 traces the contradictions of postcolonial development in the first four decades of India's socialist period of growth (1947 to early 1990s), and how these contradictions shaped the environmentalism of the poor. Section 3.3 discusses the characteristics of neoliberal growth (early 1990s onwards), the changed role of the

state in India, and how these changes shape new environmentalisms of the poor. Section 3.4 analyses prominent new environmentalisms in the neoliberal era. The analysis in section 3.5 compares the transformations to the environmentalism of the poor by the imperatives of the neoliberal era. Section 3.6, the concluding section, points to the gap between today's articulations of environmental justice from India and the dominant climate justice narrative in the North.

3.2. How the postcolonial state shapes environmentalism

Two dominant theoretical approaches, the Liberal and the Marxist, interpret the character and aspiration of the postcolonial developmental state and offer an understanding of its inherent contradiction. The liberal approach views the postcolonial state as the principal tool in society's modernisation (Migdal 1988). As opposed to the West where it was an outcome of the Industrial Revolution, modernisation in the postcolonial context is regarded as the means to recovering from the underdevelopment created by colonialism (Kumar 2005). As an instrument for both economic modernisation through mainstream development and political and cultural modernisation through institution building and establishing a rational, scientific outlook, the role of the state is seen as active or interventionist.

The Marxist approach sees the postcolonial state as the principal agent for the development of capitalism through direct state control over major means of production and resources since indigenous capitalists are not in a position to develop various sectors of the economy (Berberoglu 1992) Several scholars endorse the latter approach to analysing the post-independence Indian state. Patnaik and Chandrashekhar argue that the state actively intervened to develop a relatively anomalous Indian capitalism to compete with global capitalism (1998). According to Nayyar, phrases like 'commanding heights' of the economy and the 'socialistic pattern of society' epitomised the state's centrality (1998). Bhambhri argues that the state was 'the repository of all basic tasks of capitalist development' such as mobilising resources, transforming productive relations by

establishing conditions for the development of science and technology, and homogenising multiple groups under the capitalist ideology (1988, p. 4).

Singh (1990) argues that the Indian state should be studied on its own grounds since its historical patterns and development pathways, adopted since independence led to the creation of a mixed economy. Such an economy contained liberal-democratic institutions and combined pre-capitalist and capitalist modes of production in agriculture, and state and private sectors in industry¹¹. According to Kumar, the contradiction in this model lay in the fact that the wide-ranging public sector served capitalistic development even though it seemed an instrument for a socialist economy (Kumar 2005).

The gap between the intent and the effect of the postcolonial state's economic pathway exposed the contradictions of mainstream industrialisation within India's diverse and highly unequal society. India's historic rich-poor divide continues to play out along the lines of caste, ethnicity, class and gender. Dreze and Sen describe Indian society as a 'unique cocktail of lethal divisions and disparities' that mutually reinforce one another to create 'an extremely oppressive social system where those at the bottom of these multiple layers of disadvantage live in conditions of extreme disempowerment' (2013, p. 213).

India is the world's largest constitutional democracy and the majority of its eligible voting populations live in non-urban settings. The adoption of the Constitution gave political equality to an economically and socially unequal society and meant that India entered into what Ambedkar (1950) called 'a life of contradictions'¹². Although it holds all citizens as equal, the Constitution acknowledges historical marginalisation of India's Indigenous people, known as Adivasis ('native dwellers') by demarcating them as Scheduled Tribes (ST) and the 'untouchable' Dalits by demarcating them as Scheduled Castes (SC). It entitles such groups to positive discriminations through reservations for government jobs and in education.

¹¹ Also see *India's Mixed Economy* (Nayar 1989)

¹² Dr. B.R Ambedkar, the architect of the Indian constitution, said in an address to the Indian Parliament that 'on the 26th of January 1950, we are going to enter into a life of contradictions. In politics we will have equality and in social and economic life we will have inequality' (Ambedkar 1950, para 1).

Article 244 of the Constitution enshrines special safeguards for Adivasi land rights through geographically demarcated tribal majority Scheduled Areas where separate legal and administrative frameworks apply. The Fifth Schedule of the Constitution maps out tribal majority areas across nine states, six of which are in central India¹³. Scheduled Areas hold some of India's thickest forests and largest mineral deposits including coal reserves. The Constitution's intention of redressing structural marginalisation was however incorporated within a vision of India as a rational-scientific modern state whose 'most backward' citizens would be given special assistance in 'becoming modern'. Mainstream industrialisation was deemed the only possible solution to bring Adivasis into modernity¹⁴.

India's economic imperative for poverty alleviation co-mingled with its postcolonial ambitions to grow as a sovereign nation. The first Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru famously said that his ambition was for India to 'catch up, as far as we can, with the Industrial Revolution that occurred long ago in Western countries' (Nehru 1952). Centralised industrialisation was undertaken through the Five Year Plans of the National Planning Commission with the state elevated to the 'commanding heights of the economy'. According to the Marxist approach, this created a state-capitalist model of growth that served urban elites while triggering upheavals across its larger rural society.

Adivasi and subsistence communities were the most affected by this one-size-fits-all approach to development through land-evictions and loss of livelihoods¹⁵ (see Fernandes 2007; Negi and Ganguly 2011; Padel 2016; Sainath 1996). Even though

¹³ The Sixth Schedule applies to Adivasi majority areas across four states in the northeast.

¹⁴ This view of an industrialised modernity differed from the Gandhian vision of self-sufficient villages as the social and economic web of life. It was believed that the benefits of economic growth that accrued to the upper economic classes would trickle down to the poor once they too became part of the economic development story. In the future that this model of development envisaged for a primarily rural and economically diverse society, the majority of Indians were seen as living in cities and not pursuing subsistence livelihoods (Shrivastava and Kothari 2012).

¹⁵ There are several statistics on the number of people displaced by large developmental projects. Fernandes (2008) estimates that developmental projects have ousted an estimated 60 million from their own lands since independence. Sainath (1996) estimates project-affected displacement figures in the pre-economic liberalisation era (1951 to 1990) to be around 26 million. Negi and Ganguly (2011) estimate that 50 million have been displaced over 50 years, of which 16.4 million were ousted by dams, 2.55 million by mines, 1.25 million by industrial developments and 0.6 million by wildlife sanctuaries and national parks (Kohli et al. 2018).

they constitute only 8.6% of India's population, Adivasis remain the worst impacted, constituting 40% of all displacements since independence for dams, mines, industrial development, and national parks¹⁶ (Kohli et al. 2018). Home to large Adivasi populations, India's forests have served as sites of conflict since colonial times. The colonial-era Indian Forest Act that was passed in 1878¹⁷ and amended in 1927, restricted the access of forest-dependent communities to the forest commons and forest produce under the guise of scientific forestry (Guha 2000), causing 'a deep feeling of injustice and resentment' (Guha 2000, p. 55).

The British colonial government also brought in the *Land Acquisition Act 1892* (LAA) that continued unchanged for nearly a century till 1984¹⁸. The LAA vested arbitrary powers in the state for land acquisitions, using a justification of common good or public purpose as the objective behind such acquisitions. The doctrine of eminent domain enshrined in the LAA established that 'land may be taken because the state holds a superior layer of property rights' (Reynolds 2010, p.2) In several respects, independent India continued aggregating resources and land for industrialisation in the same vein as the erstwhile colonial state (Padel 2016). Contradictorily, the postcolonial state considered its eminent domain over lands and resources as integral to sovereignty (Ramesh and Khan 2015). For vulnerable communities, land acquisition that was often enforced under duress remained associated with the malaise of dispossession and loss of livelihoods in the post-independence era.

The postcolonial state's strong developmental focus (Williams and Mawdsley 2006) replicated age-old land injustices by invoking the moral imperative of

¹⁶ A government report produced during the 8th Five Year Plan (1990-1995), based on a comprehensive study of 110 developmental projects since independence, concluded that almost 50% of the 1.694 million displaced, or 814,000, were Adivasis (Government of India 1993). Between the 1960s and 1970s, large dams played the biggest role in displacing an estimated 11.5 million Indians, largely Adivasis, without proper rehabilitation (Fernandes and Ganguly-Thukral 1989).

¹⁷ The Indian Forest Act 1878 demarcated the majority of India's forests as fully government controlled reserved forests. The other two categories of control and ownership set down by the Act included protected forests that were partly government controlled, and village forests that were controlled by villages adjoining forests. The Indian Forest Act and the Indian Forest Department that started in 1864 owe their origin to the expansion of the colonial railway that caused high levels of deforestation in peninsular India to meet the need for fuel and timber.

¹⁸ It was amended and finally replaced by the *Right to Fair Compensation and Transparency in Land Acquisition, Rehabilitation and Resettlement Act 2013* (RFCTLARR) or LARR.

national interest and poverty alleviation. In what is considered the most emblematic example of this phenomenon, Jawaharlal Nehru, talking to potential evictees at the site of India's largest dam project in 1948, infamously said, '...if you must suffer, suffer for the greater common good' (Roy 1999, para 1). At the United Nations Conference on Human Environment (UNCHE) in Stockholm in 1972, Prime Minister Indira Gandhi notably reflected on India's environment versus development question:

On the one hand the rich look askance at our continuing poverty--on the other, they warn us against their own methods. We do not wish to impoverish the environment any further and yet we cannot for a moment forget the grim poverty of large numbers of people. Are not poverty and need the greatest polluters?...The environment cannot be improved in conditions of poverty. Nor can poverty be eradicated without the use of science and technology (Gandhi 1972, para 9).

The 1970s and 1980s signified a major shift in the state's outlook towards the environment and particularly forests, and constituted an official acknowledgement of the environmental crisis (Shrivastava and Kothari 2012). The Constitution was amended following the 1972 UN Stockholm Conference to include articles 48A and 51A that made the state and citizens responsible for environmental protection. Article 48A declares 'the state shall endeavour to protect and improve the environment and to safeguard the forests and wild life of the country', and is contained under the 'Directive Principles of State Policy' which are fundamental to the country's governance. The amendment gave the state a constitutional mandate for environmental protection, making the Indian Constitution one of the very few in the world to enshrine protection and improvement of the environment (Chakravarty 2006).

Some of the prominent laws brought in during this period include the *Forest Conservation Act 1980 (FCA)*, *Water (Prevention and Control of Pollution) Act 1974*, and the *Air Pollution Act 1981*. The Bhopal Gas Disaster of 1984 acted as a trigger for various environmental policies starting with the issues of corporate accountability and toxic waste management (Reich and Bowonder 1992). The

Environment Protection Act 1986 (EPA) was enacted to implement the decisions of the UN conference relating to the protection and improvement of the human environment. These legislations however did not shift the disenfranchisement of subsistence communities through industrialisation.

Although not on the scale of industrial projects, one-size fits-all wildlife conservation models also carried portentous consequences¹⁹ (Guha 1989). Adivasis were dispossessed through the creation of tiger reserves since 1973 (Guha and Martinez-Alier 1997; Rangarajan and Shahabuddin 2006) and expansions to India's Protected Areas Network after the enactment of the Indian Wildlife Act (1972) (Shahabuddin and Bhamidipati 2014).

Civil society movements questioned the lack of distributive justice in India's development process. The environmentalism of the poor sometimes succeeded in asserting another vision of development that prioritised sustainability and livelihoods, as seen in the case of the Chipko movement. But on the whole, ideas such as dams as the 'temples of modern India'²⁰ dominated the political-economic discourse under state capitalism and sustained a selective understanding of the notion of the greater common good. Owing to the non-privatised nature of development characterised by Public Sector Enterprises (PSEs) and direct state control of resources, economic growth was largely believed to be serving the national interest, regardless of its disproportionate impacts across India's class, ethnicity, caste and gender divides.

3.3. How the neoliberal state shapes environmentalism of the poor

Changes to India's economy after the 1990s brought the selective definition of public interest into question by introducing private players into various economic sectors. Although in the making from the mid-1980s, the definitive transition to liberalisation is attributed to sweeping reforms in 1991 aimed at relieving India's

¹⁹ Lascorgeix and Kothari (2009) estimate that approximately 100,000 people have been displaced by the creation of protected areas between 1970 and 2008.

²⁰ Prime Minister Nehru regarded dams as the 'temples of modern India' (Khilnani 1998, p.61)

international debt and under persuasion from international financial institutions (Corbridge and Harriss 2003). Liberalisation ushered in transformations to the relationship of the state and economy through a combination of outward looking reforms to align with the global market, and internal reforms to allow the entry of private enterprise into core sectors like education, healthcare, telecommunications and energy.

The entry of private companies into sectors previously operated by state run Public Sector Enterprises (PSEs) was facilitated through state-corporate Public Private Partnerships (PPPs) (Nielsen 2010). Structural reforms were introduced to align with private capital and facilitate the entry of Foreign Direct Investments into India (FDIs). The Indian state simultaneously decentralised by devolving powers to state governments and local elected bodies. Such mutually interlinked transformations during the first decade of liberalisation changed the character of the Indian state more than any changes instituted since independence (Gupta and Sivaramakrishnan 2011).

Acquisition of growing proportions of land by governments for private companies (Reddy and Reddy 2007) and the setting up of Special Economic Zones (SEZs) were brought under the purview of neoliberal development, raising fundamental questions about whose interests the state served and who it failed to protect. While India's exports increased, critical schemes such as the Public Distribution System (PDS) that serves as India's food security system and sectors such as agriculture were deprioritised via the reduction in fertile land for food cultivation (Shrivastava and Kothari 2012). How neoliberalism changed India's postcolonial developmental state, impacted marginalised communities, and shaped new grassroots politics of the disaffected, has led to various conceptualisations of neoliberalism in the Indian context.

3.3.1. Contradictions of neoliberalism in India

Neoliberalism has been variously described across literatures, but they all share certain common perspectives. David Harvey approaches neoliberalism as a 'theory

of political, economic practices proposing that human well-being can be advanced by the maximisation of entrepreneurial freedoms within an institutional framework characterised by private property rights, individual liberty, unencumbered markets, and free trade' (Harvey 2007a, p.22). Davies (2014) on the other hand, regards the term neoliberal as a larger modernising force that aims to produce a new social and political order, coming close to Foucault's understanding of a neoliberal governing rationality (Foucault 2008). The self-regulating market is central to the neoliberal structure. It is expanded in geographic scope and acts as the governing mechanism for the allocation of goods and services (McCarthy and Prudham 2004).

Neoliberal policy targets institutions and activities that used to lie outside the market in order to commodify them through privatisation amongst others means (Davies 2014, p. 310). The process entails the commodification even of previously uncommodified 'natural benefits' and the non-human natural world, including land, water, ecosystem services, as well as environmental pollution, creating ethical and moral issues around the commodification of everything (Harvey 2007b). The state in the neoliberal context plays an active role in enabling and defending the market, private property rights, and commodification (Foucault 2008; Peck 2001).

Outside of this role, the state is understood to withdraw or reconfigure its functions through rescaling of governance and fiscal and administrative cuts (McCarthy and Prudham 2004). The idea of neoliberalism has been variously seen as transforming other kinds of capitalism such as embedded capitalism (Harvey 2005), postcolonial capitalism (Sanyal 2007) or developmental capitalism (Chatterjee 2008). In the Indian context however, Munster and Strumpell (2014) argue that contemporary changes may not signify a great departure from the historic or macroeconomic perspective; the obvious differences in the Indian state under neoliberalism as opposed to Nehruvian postcolonialism come to light more clearly through everyday lived experiences.

There have been substantial discussions on the nature and function of the Indian state since the 1991 reforms, particularly around is distinctly neoliberal about the

present state. Munster (2012) points to a continuing trend of the state's high visibility in the decades following 1991 through programs including state-level midday meal schemes, subsidized rice for below poverty line (BPL) families, and responding to the ongoing crisis of farmer suicides. Chatterjee (2008) points to the paradox of the *Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act 2005* (MGNREGA), the world's largest social security scheme, created after liberalisation, as evidence that the neoliberal development is robbing the majority of Indians of their land-based livelihoods.

Gupta and Sivaramakrishnan (2011) similarly argue that not following the standard neoliberal narrative of slashing public infrastructure is an outcome peculiar to Indian democracy where poor and rural groups far outweigh the urban electorate and governments are subjected to popular pressures. Instead of exceptions to the process of neoliberalisation, Harriss sees significant state interventions as a new Polanyian double movement (Harriss 2011; cf. Polanyi 2001 [1944]).

High GDP growth during the first decade of neoliberalism was predominantly on account of resource extraction. The government approached inclusive growth not by keeping the needs of India's rural economy at the centre of its concerns but by redistributing revenues obtained from high growth sectors aligned to the global market amongst indigent sections of the population. Harriss and Corbridge (2010) contend that economic reforms did not lead to a corresponding reduction in poverty. Poverty reduction required a systematic focus on vital sectors and meeting developmental indicators. Critics point to the case of Gujarat, hailed as the poster-child of India's neoliberal growth, to explain this contradiction. Gujarat clocked the country's highest GDP by concentrating large investments in resource extraction, chiefly by private corporations. But what has come to be known as the Gujarat model of growth failed to improve social and developmental indicators²¹ (Jafferlot 2016).

²¹ The significant social costs of the Gujarat model included the neglect of crucial sectors like agriculture (Rajagopal 2010). Neglect of healthcare was found to accentuate poverty despite Gujarat's relatively rich status compared to most other states (Mahadevia 2000).

Chatterjee (2008) also contends that the precarious balance between the three dominant classes – industrialist capitalists, rich farmers and the salaried white collars – over bargaining for state power that Bardhan (1984) proposed in his study of Indian class politics and the state, has now been replaced by an exclusive favouring of industrial capitalists by governments. The state-business nexus in India is now characterised by a narrow alliance of business and political elites (Kohli 2007). It has created a phenomenon referred to as crony capitalism, which is causing undue favours to be extended to corporations at the neglect of the public interest (Thakurta 2015).

According to Oskarsson (2015), the reforms have specifically reoriented the state's behaviour in favour of private resource extraction. According to Levien (2011), this reorientation makes the state a land broker through facilitating land acquisition for private mining. Critics interpret the success of Adani Enterprises in Gujarat as a blatant example of crony capitalism in neoliberal India. Privileges made available to Adani Enterprises by the government for the private coal port, thermal power plants and SEZ at Mundra included land offered at throwaway prices (Nayar et al. 2014).

Developed under the *Special Economic Zones Act 2005*, Mundra was one of many SEZs dotting the Indian landscape after 1991²² where full play of the free market was enabled through a suspension of national laws. Mundra, a largely undisturbed coastal region, was transformed by severe environmental degradation and disruption to farming and traditional fishing livelihoods²³ (Narain 2013). Opposition to the social and environmental impacts of SEZs formed the first wave of scattered resistances to India's neoliberal growth; these sites became targets for activists' criticism of governments failing to deliver in the public interest (Sharma and Singh 2009).

²² The Indian government had approved 439 SEZs between 1991 and 2008 (Sharma 2009).

²³ At Mundra, extensive industrialisation was coupled with widespread environmental breaches by the Adani Group. A federal inquiry found illegal coastal pollution and large-scale mangrove destruction by Adani caused a drastic decline in fish catch. Illegal port developments obstructed access to traditional fishing grounds (Narain 2013).

3.3.2. Facilitating private extractive accumulation

In what historian Ramachandra Guha calls India's age of ecological arrogance (Guha 2014), concentrated industrialisation and resource extraction led to unprecedented environmental changes. To facilitate ease of business, the state dismantled its elaborate bureaucratic red tape known as the Licence Raj. This meant drastic reductions in environmental approval and social impacts assessment periods particularly for mining projects. The pattern of weakening environmental safeguards gained prominence from the second decade of post-reform growth when India's GDP grew to a record high of 7-8% annual growth. However, the extent to which the Modi government sought to weaken environmental protections from 2014 is considered unprecedented²⁴ (Nayar 2016).

To put the Environment Ministry's approval timescales into perspective, between 1982 and 1999, it took the ministry an average of five years to approve mining projects; between 2000 and 2004 this window fell to three years (Rajshkhar 2012). What followed since can only be described as a landslide. In the two terms of the Congress led United Progressive Alliance that followed this period, the clearance window first fell to 17 months (2004-2009) and then to 11 months (2009-2014). In 2016, the Modi Government publicised that it would reduce environmental clearance periods to just 180 days (PTI 2016b), claiming it will unlock Rs 10 trillion (A\$200 billion) worth of investments through the clearance of 2000 projects in two years (PTI 2016a)²⁵.

In *Green Wars*, journalist Bahar Dutt puts into perspective the scale of environmental destruction from proposed energy projects by 2014:

²⁴ The Centre for Science and Environment's (CSE) *Report Card* on the Modi government's environmental governance summed up the streamlining effort as involving the setting up of a single window for environmental, forest and wildlife clearances, standardising terms of reference for various sectors, devolving project clearance to state, district and regional authorities, diluting public consultation in the environmental clearance process by requiring fewer projects to undertake it and relaxing the need for community consent before destroying forest. It further undermined community concerns, especially around contentious mining projects, compared to the previous Congress-led UPA government.

²⁵ The Government however failed to substantiate its own claim of one million new jobs being created from this dramatic easing of clearance windows (Dutt 2016).

In North India, the Upper Gangetic Basin has been earmarked for over 300 small and big hydropower dams. Once these dams are constructed, almost 70% of the Ganga and its tributaries will flow through tunnels, submerging large swathes of rich Himalayan forests...Combined with other projects like shipyards, ports and coastal mining, this (fifteen coal fired power projects) implies there would be big infrastructure projects every 20-25 km along the (western) Konkan coast.

...An estimated 182 large dams, power plants and chemical treatment plants will be set up in the biodiversity hotspot of the Western Ghats, just recognised by the UN as a World Heritage Site, home to over 5,000 species of plants and 100 species of mammals, with many new species yet to be discovered. Now take a look at this model of development on India's forests. Since 1980, over 1.5 lakh (150,000) hectares of forestland have been diverted for the cause of India's development, 50% of that figure in the last ten years... (Environment) ministry that should have played a protectionist role now plays the role of a distributor. The ministry has itself admitted that almost 95% of the projects that come to it are cleared.

(Dutt 2014, p. xiii)

Mining of coal and other minerals rose by 75% between 1993-94 and 2008-2009 (Kothari and Shrivastava 2012) requiring a growing proportion of land to be acquired and forests to be cleared. The mining industry in general and coal mining in particular has been granted the highest share of environmental and forest clearances. States acquiring an increasing proportion of land for private mining in mineral rich central India, including in designated Scheduled areas, caused what has been called a ground-clearing of Adivasis and directly violated provisions for prior consent and individual and community rights over forestlands enshrined in law (Bharadwaj 2018a).

Government rhetoric surrounding the transfer of lands from communities for private mining has characterised affected peasants and Adivasis as stumbling

blocks instead of stakeholders²⁶ (Bharadwaj 2018a). The neoliberal state's actions have therefore been compared to colonial expansion during the late nineteenth and early twentieth century that Marx characterised as primitive accumulation. Harvey's concept of accumulation by dispossession builds on the phenomenon of primitive accumulation by depicting its ongoing nature as well as its extension through privatisation and commodification (Harvey 2003).

Reoriented towards private extraction, the neoliberalising process in India is characterised by 'accumulation by dispossession' in which the state plays a key role by acting as a land broker, exposing its corporate bias and acting against the public interest.

3.3.3. Legal contest between democracy and dispossession

Indian laws hold contradictory ideologies owing to their colonial nature and oscillate between promoting the interests of market capitalism and the special needs of certain groups. They can either serve as instruments of justice or risk being captured by vested interests (Washbrook 1981). Sundar (2011) argues that their contradictory ideologies enable the phenomenon of land grab; the term land grabbing has been specifically used to describe land acquisition post 1990s.

A 2009 report by the Rural Development Ministry on land reforms²⁷ described the land alienation of Adivasis as 'the biggest grab of tribal lands after Columbus' in which the state is complicit (State Agrarian Relations Committee 2009). It found that landlessness had increased from 40% in 1991 to 52% in 2005 in rural areas. The appetite for land speculation amongst investors has grown and acquisitions

²⁶ Governments are taking lands for private corporations by recategorising their condition and value. The CSE *Report Card* warned that proposals to divert so called degraded forest lands to the private sector for afforestation would threaten over 20 million farmers involved in farm-forestry and violate the Forest Rights Act (CSE 2016).

²⁷ The Report of the Committee on State Agrarian Relations and the Unfinished Task in Land Reforms (2009) brought out by the Ministry of Rural Development is a recent and comprehensive policy intervention on the unfinished task of land reform in India (State Agrarian Relations Committee 2009).

have acquired a brutal character with the state even using police machinery to tackle farmer's efforts to protect their lands.

The neoliberal state's attempts at mitigating the social impacts of land acquisition repeated the pattern of the colonial state, which was compelled to ameliorate the effects of repressive laws through the passage of countervailing protective legislations (Sundar 2011). The colonial era LAA had remained the main instrument for land acquisitions, with the *Coal Bearing Areas (Acquisition and Development) Act 1957* (CBA) being applicable specifically to coal extraction related acquisition (Bedi 2013). Democratic reforms such as the *Forest Rights Act 2006* (FRA) and the *Right to Fair Compensation and Transparency in Land Acquisition, Rehabilitation and Resettlement Act 2013* (RFCTLARR), or simply LARR, were passed by the Indian parliament to redress historic injustices towards Adivasi groups and their access to forestlands, and to overhaul land acquisition's colonial legacy of dispossession, faced significant challenges.

Land Acquisition, Rehabilitation and Resettlement Act 2013

The *Land Acquisition, Rehabilitation and Resettlement Act 2013* (LARR) gave citizens a say in how the state should deal with their lands for the first time since independence (Ramesh and Khan 2015)²⁸. It curbed the powers of the state in acquiring people's lands through the principle of eminent domain (Sonak 2018). The LARR made it mandatory to seek approvals from affected communities through the clauses of consent²⁹ and social impact assessment (SIA), as well as to resettle and rehabilitate title-holders and livelihood losers. It set the compensation formula at four times the value of rural and twice that of urban land, and also contained provisions related to return of unused lands and food security (Kohli et al. 2018).

²⁸ The LARR however continued to exhibit the colonial mindset of the previous legislation by equating private projects designed and implemented to generate corporate profits with public interest.

²⁹ According to the law, private projects required 80% of the affected community's consent while public private partnerships (PPP) required 70%, in order to be able to proceed with land acquisition.

The passage of LARR in Indian parliament acknowledged that injustices occurred during the state's land acquisition drive. It was an attempt to pacify widespread social unrest (Sundar 2011). But the passing of the act generated outrage amongst companies pursuing large-scale industrial projects (Ranjan 2017). The Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) supported the LARR while in opposition, but once in government, it introduced the LARR Ordinance in parliament driven by the need to provide land cheaply and quickly to investors³⁰ (Kohli and Gupta 2017).

Along with amendments envisaged in the original law³¹, the LARR Ordinance created a special category of projects³² that would be exempt from requiring consent and a social impact assessment, review by an expert group, and bars on acquisition of agricultural land³³. Since most land acquisitions fell within these categories, it effectively nullified the safeguards of the 2013 law and defeated the LARR's original aim to empower communities vulnerable to land displacement³⁴ (Ramesh and Khan 2015).

Although the Central Government failed to pass its proposed dilutions³⁵, several state governments amended their own Land Acquisition Acts to substantially replicate the Ordinance, and used constitutional provisions to dilute the progressive clauses of LARR. Dilutions included exempting projects from the mandatory social impact assessment and consent of landowners, and reducing the

³⁰ The Modi Government claimed that the Act stalled investments up to Rs. 20 lakh crore (A\$400 billion) especially in rail, steel, mining and roads sectors (Jitendra 2015).

³¹ The law exempt 13 laws pertaining to acquisition for priority projects in sectors such as railways, national highways, atomic energy and electricity from fulfilling its stipulated conditions on a temporary basis, with the requirement that these laws be amended within a year to bring their compensation, resettlement and rehabilitation clauses at par with the new law (Ramesh and Khan 2015).

³² Items in the special category included defence, rural infrastructure, affordable housing, industrial corridors and infrastructure projects that included Public Private Partnerships with government ownership of land (Indian Express 2015).

³³ The Ordinance introduced nine amendments to the original law. Other dilutions carried out by the BJP government's Ordinance included the retrospective clause, the definition of compensation paid, accountability for defaulting bureaucrats, and provision for return of unutilised land. It also extended the special powers of the government and expanded the definition of private entity (Indian Express 2015).

³⁴ An analysis of all the land disputes before the Indian Supreme Court between 1950 and 2016 showed that the exempt categories account for half the land conflicts (Wahi et al. 2017).

³⁵ It was passed in the Lok Sabha (Lower House) owing to the BJP's majority, amidst protests by the opposition. It was defeated in the Rajya Sabha (Upper House) where the ruling BJP did not have a majority (Jitendra 2015). Outside parliament the Ordinance triggered mass protests by farmers and civil society groups.

compensation amounts for land acquisition (Kohli and Gupta 2017). Reforms to India's colonial era practice of land acquisitions were shaped by social movements, but subsequently weakened to favour private investments and further disadvantage communities (Kohli et al. 2018).

The significance of and risks to the Forest Rights Act 2006

The Scheduled Tribes and Other Traditional Forest Dwellers (Recognition of Forest Rights) Act 2006 (FRA) was enacted by the Indian Parliament in recognition of decades of mobilisations by forest dwelling communities (Kumar and Kerr 2012). It was also driven by the need to alleviate grassroots unrest from land dispossession from the first decade of neoliberalism, especially to contain Naxalism³⁶ in forested central India. It aimed to redress injustices towards forest-dependent communities since the inception of the Forest Act in 1878. A sustained movement for forest rights converged under the umbrella of the 'Campaign for Survival and Dignity' and made forest rights an issue for the 2004 Indian general elections on account of the Adivasi vote. The progressive FRA was passed into law under the Congress led United Progressive Alliance government.

The colonial Forest Act displaced thousands of Adivasis and absorbed their forest commons into state-owned Reserved Forests. The movement leading up to the FRA generated alternative discourses of legitimacy and the inclusion of marginalised voices in representative democracy (Kumar and Kerr 2012). The Forest Rights Act recognises both community-based and individual rights over forestlands (Government of India (GOI) 2006). The preamble to the FRA acknowledged that the rights of Adivasis and other traditional forest-dwelling people had not been 'adequately recognised in the consolidation of state forests during the colonial

³⁶ The Press Release of the Ministry of Home Affairs on 27 April, 2007, 'Coordination Centre meeting on Naxalism held' emphasized that: On the development front, the states were advised to review their Resettlement and Rehabilitation policies on a priority basis. The need to put special focus on the implementation of Backward Regions Grant Fund (BRGF), *Panchayat (Extension to Schedule Areas) Act 1996* (PESA), the National Rural Employment Guarantee Program (NREGP), and the *Scheduled Tribes and other Traditional Forest Dwellers (Recognition of Forest Rights) Act 2006* (FRA).

period as well as in independent India resulting in historical injustice'³⁷ (Rajshekhar 2012). Critics however point out that the FRA attempts to limit and individualise ownership over forestlands (Bharadwaj 2018a).

The FRA provided statutory backing for community driven forest governance in India for the first time, giving communities a transparent and participatory opportunity for managing biodiversity, water catchments and ecologically sensitive local resources (Kumar and Kerr 2012). It was predated by the *Panchayat (Extension to Schedule Areas) Act 1996* (PESA), that extended certain powers of governance to Panchayats (village councils) and recognised *Gram Sabhas* (village assemblies) as decision-making bodies in Scheduled Areas. PESA mandated that *Gram Sabhas* be consulted before land acquisitions could be implemented.

These laws transformed discourses around forest ownership and management in favour of communities. *Gram Sabhas* are the only officially recognised spaces where Adivasi and forest-dwelling people can participate in the state's decision-making process on mining on their own lands (Chowdhury 2016). If properly implemented, the FRA can substantially alter living conditions of forest-dependent communities. However, an analysis of the progress in FRA implementation in the first ten years found that a mere 3% of community rights were recognised across India (CFR-LA 2016).

The provisions of the FRA often acted as a double-edged sword for communities. Under obligation to abide by the FRA's provisions, state governments eager to earn mining revenues would often forge *Gram Sabha* resolutions (for mining) on Adivasi lands (Chowdhury 2016). In Chhattisgarh, village councils were either never informed, or the people were terrorised into consent. Even worse, sometimes a 'No Objection' certificate indicating the community's consent for mining was illegally obtained³⁸. Community rights were also withheld in central

³⁷The preamble to the FRA recognises that such communities are integral to the survival and sustainability of the forest ecosystem.

³⁸ The Chhattisgarh government violated Adivasi rights with impunity despite PESA stipulating prior informed consent of village councils for mining projects. But when cases were brought to court, the judiciary tended to 'wink' at the transfer of forestland to corporations, thereby legitimising land grab in Scheduled Areas (Bharadwaj 2018b).

India through the slow and flawed implementation of the FRA, with the rejection rate of forest-rights-claims being as high as 50% (Bharadwaj 2018a). Chhattisgarh even removed already granted community forest rights to facilitate private mining, setting a dangerous precedent for Scheduled Areas around India ³⁹ (Sethi 2016).

Dilution of laws

The first two decades of post-reform growth also witnessed the creation of other tools for participative democracy such as the *Right to Information (RTI) Act 2005* and the National Green Tribunal (NGT) enacted through the *National Green Tribunal Act 2010*⁴⁰. However, such legal progresses as was made in the first two decades of post-reform growth started unravelling during the third⁴¹. Although the Congress led UPA government started diluting provisions for public consultation for mining, especially coal, the Bharatiya Janata Party took unparalleled steps towards diluting democratic provisions in legislations, weakening environmental guidelines and regulations, and reducing environmental clearance times.

The dilution of the progressive LARR further aggravated the circumstances for forest-dependent communities attempting to claim their rights through the FRA and participate in decision making on mining on their lands through PESA, given that such legal provisions were already being violated by states in mineral-rich parts of India (Ranjan 2017).

Legal mobilisation plays an important part in today's social mobilisations. Legal movements often seek to protect earlier legislation from new ones that risk diluting or abrogating hard won rights. They also campaign for new laws that can

³⁹ The other risks of compromise of the provisions of the FRA and the rights of communities arise from the shortening of approval timelines for environmental clearances, exempting linear infrastructure projects from requiring *Gram Sabha* consensus and relaxing the requirement of public consent for coal mining projects under the FRA (CSE 2016).

⁴⁰ The NGT is an independent body with special adjudicative powers for environmental protection through which communities and their legal representatives can seek information on developmental projects, as well as take issues to special interest courts for redressing. It was created to implement the provision of Article 21 of the Constitution that assures Indian citizens a healthy environment as a part of their fundamental rights.

⁴¹ For example, the NGT has been undermined through the ceasing of four of its regional benches from operating due to non-appointment of members, making it difficult for challenges to be filed, heard and examined (Chowdhury and Srivastava 2018).

fulfil democratic aspirations in the postcolonial era (Sundar 2011). Both LARR and FRA were passed following significant social movements. The politics surrounding the passage and subsequent weakening of the FRA and LARR speak to a pattern of oscillation by the Indian state between private interests and people's mobilisations through implementing or diluting democratic legal provisions.

3.3.4. Crisis of democracy

Neoliberal development contradicted India's vision of inclusive growth by integrating urban India into the global economy while largely leaving rural India behind⁴². Shrivastava and Kothari (2012) argue that mining in particular has not led to a corresponding economic benefit or improvement in welfare for locals in the mineral dependent eastern states of Jharkhand, Orissa and Chhattisgarh that still have lower per capita incomes and higher food insecurity than other states. This situation is worsened by declining employment in mining; although the value of mineral production increased fourfold between 1991 and 2004, employment in mining dropped by 30% (ibid).

Critics characterise this deepened socio-economic divide in various ways. Shrivastava and Kothari (2012) see this as a difference between India and Bharat (Hindi for India), the former urban and prospering from neoliberal development, and the latter rural and experiencing increasing inequality in development vis-à-vis urban India. Sanyal (2007) differentiates between civil society who are beneficiaries of economic globalisation and the need economy that is propped up by the welfare mechanisms of the government. Chatterjee (2004) refers to the rural and urban poor as the political society since their relation to the state is predicated on politically negotiated arrangements rather than through civil rights as in the case of the urban elites and middle classes that constitute the civil society⁴³. Other critics however warn against Chatterjee's categorisation of Indian society along a simple socio-economic dichotomy that does not factor in manifold

⁴² The vision for inclusive growth has most recently been publicised through Narendra Modi's catchy slogan *saab ke saath sab ka vikas* ('development with and for everyone').

⁴³ Chatterjee (2004) asserts that the relationship between civil society and political society has changed significantly since 1991 on account of the former benefitting from and the latter being left out of neoliberal growth.

social inequalities generated through neoliberal transformations (see Baviskar and Sundar 2008; Eckert 2006)⁴⁴.

The cost of neoliberal growth keeps compounding on the India that is left behind and continues to deepen the socio-economic divide⁴⁵. This phenomenon explains what Harvey (2005) calls the contrast between the ideology and the practice of neoliberalism. Even though it's stated goal is the freedom and wellbeing of all citizens through the withdrawal of state intervention in the market, in most cases neoliberal policies are accompanied by the restoration or formation of class inequality. The state then intervenes with positive⁴⁶ or negative consequences for communities, thereby either deepening or threatening democracy. The state can resort to fear or persuasion that is often expressed through nationalistic sentiments (Munster and Strumpell 2014).

In 2014, the Modi government cancelled the registration of as many as 9000 non-governmental organisations (NGOs) that received foreign-funding on the pretext that they did not comply with the Indian tax codes (Kaushal 2015). Critics viewed the move as a first step in fast-tracking development (Ranjan 2014). The Intelligence Bureau, India's domestic security and intelligence agency, deemed these groups a risk to India's national economic security (Rowlatt 2015) because they resisted large industrial projects. As communities who face the brunt of today's developments have asserted their rights, conflicts have multiplied. According to the Global Atlas of Environmental Justice, a global database of environmental conflicts, India has the world's highest number of environmental conflicts (ejatlas.org/country/india). The contradictions of neoliberal development have effectively created a crisis of democracy in India.

⁴⁴ As an example, Adivasi struggles for regional self-determination that acted to protect against land dispossession by the state and corporations (Padel and Das 2010) cannot be adequately explained through this dichotomy.

⁴⁵ The 'trickle down theory' as the way forward for reducing inequality in India stands disproven (Basu and Mallick 2008).

⁵ Chatterjee (2008) argues that the state's interventions are guided primarily by a fear of the dispossessed turning into dangerous classes and threatening political stability.

3.4. Environmentalism of the poor in neoliberal India

This section discusses the new platforms, concepts, narratives and politics of the environmentalism of the poor in the neoliberal era that have been shaped by the changed role of the Indian state. Through tracing four exemplary environmental mass movements– farmers’ resistance to the POSCO Steel Mill, the Dongriya Kondh tribe’s resistance to bauxite mining, the Pathalgarhi constitutional rights Movement, and the Anti-Nuclear People’s Movement in coastal Tamil Nadu – it discusses how the new platforms, concepts, narratives and discourse of environmentalism have been utilised and honed.

3.4.1. Legal mobilisations: democracy and radical property rights

The emergence of legal tools and platforms marks one of the most significant changes from earlier movements. According to Sundar (2011), today’s people’s movements revolve around the implementation of or safeguarding progressive laws that contain democratic provisions. Ordinary people attempt to define the rule of law in ways that meet their aspirations as well as uphold such law in the face of attempts to violate and dilute them. A senior environmental lawyer from Legal Initiative for Forests and Environment (LIFE) said:

The presence of legal platforms and activists being more knowledgeable makes a big difference now. The Narmada Bachao Aandolan went to the Supreme Court, but did not get any relief or decisions in their favour. But now we have the NGT, a specialised court where such claims are heard...Success for communities is now possible through legal tools and resources even without a struggle, like in Kashang in the north east where there was no movement against the hydropower project but the Forest Rights Act was involved (LIFE senior lawyer interview 06/05/2018).

The Forest Rights Act has been hailed as a weapon for democracy on the ground a tool that gives decision-making powers to communities previously disregarded by development. The use of the FRA by communities to determine whether they want

developmental projects to proceed on their lands is regarded as a direct assertion of democracy (Kothari 2016). Through legislations such as LARR and FRA, property has emerged both as a subject for struggle and a means to livelihood, subverting the notion of property as monetised and market aligned and redefining what a fundamental right to property signifies:

The law is premised on the notion that *the right to livelihood*, even where it seems to be a property right, as in the forests, is not in fact a right in the liberal, legal sense at all. It is rather, a shorthand phrase, for the collective struggle over resources. It is a right whose exercise in a capitalist and unequal society is impossible without collective organising (Gopalkrishnan in Sundar 2007, p. 52).

The high political and economic stake in developmental projects owing to large foreign-direct investments make today's movements to protect or claim legal rights hard-fought struggles that radicalise the idea of property.

3.4.2. Resisting neoliberalism: collective struggles, diverse narratives

Today's livelihood uprisings are not considered disparate and unconnected, but a collective challenge to neoliberal development. New forms of accumulation by dispossession have effected a reconstruction of space evident through deepened environmental destruction and social disruption in the mineral-rich regions. This phenomenon is challenged through the rise of 'quintessential forms of multi-scalar critical geopolitics of popular resistance' (Bannerjee-Guha 2013, p.167). Nielsen and Oskarsson (2016) suggest that such resistances raise a common question: 'who benefits and who loses out from the current ways in which resources are governed?' (p.4).

Levien draws on the example of the National Association of People's Movements (NAPM), founded in 1992, as an organisational attempt at collectivising and adding coherence to a variety of people's struggles against neoliberal globalisation in the most diverse country on earth (2007). The coming together of various social

movements under the NAPM banner is seen as part of the global phenomenon of coordinated resistance to neoliberal capitalism (Buechler 2000) that is constituted of heterogeneous social and economic groups instead of the traditional Marxist proletariat (Levien 2007).

Some exemplary livelihood-dependent people's movements in the two decades of India's post-liberalisation economic growth have demonstrated these characteristics. Their conflicts arise out of the state's role as a broker in reallocating the forest and agricultural lands on which they rely to corporations. Their assertions are grounded in a new language of rights through which they seek democratic participation in development. They articulate diverse narratives of resistance that are both context and conflict specific, demonstrating heterogeneity of social and economic representations. I discuss the case of farmers' resistance to the POSCO steel project and the Dongriya Kondh Adivasis' resistance to Vedanta's bauxite mine in this context.

Livelihoods: Farmers against land acquisition for POSCO

In 2005, the Korean Pohang Steel Company Ltd (POSCO) signed a memorandum of understanding with the State Government of Odisha in eastern India to establish a steel plant in the coastal Jagatsinghpur district, in what was billed as India's largest foreign direct investment. In the sustained resistance by farming communities against land acquisition⁴⁷, questions of endangered livelihoods, threatened local economy, and restricted access to communal swamplands, forest produce and water emerged as the core concerns (Krishnan and Naga 2017). *Dhan-paan-meen* ('rice-betelnut-fish') became the movement's slogan, alluding to the dominant subsistence livelihoods of those farming communities resisting land acquisition.

Deemed a critical investment for both state and central governments, 'there were high-level meetings with the PM and assurances granted that the project will go ahead even before forest clearance was granted' (LIFE senior lawyer interview

⁴⁷ For a timeline of the resistance see *Timeline of the POSCO Project Prepared by the Campaign for Survival and Dignity* at: <https://forestrightsact.com/corporate-projects/the-posco-project/timeline-of-events-relating-to-forest-rights-in-posco-area/>

06/05/2018). However, over the next twelve years the company's and state government's attempts at acquisition faced a concerted opposition from communities who had been accessing these forestlands for betelnut cultivation for close to a hundred years (Das 2017). The company finally withdrew in 2016 after having failed to obtain the necessary land from the government (Sethi 2016). The success of the movement was owing to its early preparedness against land acquisition (LIFE senior lawyer interview 06/05/2018).

Indigenous cultures: Dongriya Kondhs against Vedanta's bauxite mine

In the first of its kind of use of the provision of FRA, the Dongriya Kondh tribe⁴⁸ in the Fifth Schedule designated Rayagada and Kalahandi districts in Odisha protected their sacred mountain Niyamgiri from bauxite mining by the Vedanta Corporation by unanimously rejecting mining on their lands in 2013. At the core of the Kondhs' resistance was the sacred ecology of their forested mountains, Niyamgiri, meaning hills of law, worshipped as the abode of their ancestor Niyam Raja (king of law). The community equated the loss of Niyamgiri to the loss of their identity⁴⁹ and asked that the entire mountain range be protected under a single title in the name of Niyam Raja (see Tatpati *et al.* 2016).

In 1997, the State Government of Odisha entered into a MOU with Sterlite, the Indian subsidiary of the London Stock Exchange listed Vedanta, for bauxite mining in Niyamgiri and establishing an aluminium refinery in adjoining Lanjigarh. The construction and land-acquisition phases began in 2002-2003⁵⁰. The resistance grew into a translocal and diverse environmental justice movement that drew in actors at different levels, from the local Dongriya Kondh Adivasis under the Niyamgiri Surakshya Samiti (NSS) (Niyamgiri protection group), to state and

⁴⁸ The Dongriya Kondh are categorised as a Particularly Vulnerable Tribal Group (PVTG) by the Indian Government. Their customary occupation of the Dongriya Kondh people has been reported as a complex system of agro-forestry where patches of land are cleared in rotation, collecting minor forest produce for sustenance and medicine, and rearing livestock for meat and ritual sacrifices (Saxena *et al.* 2010).

⁴⁹ Expressing this, a Dongria Kondh village priestess deposited during the meetings that "your temples are made of bricks and cement, ours are these hills, forests, leaves and streams...if you dig these, we will die with our gods", (quoted in Bera 2015).

⁵⁰ For a full timeline of the movement see Amnesty International's report p. 11: <https://www.amnesty.org/download/Documents/36000/asa200012010en.pdf>

national level allies like the People's Union of Civil Liberties (PUCL), to international human rights NGOs Amnesty, Action Aid and Survival International that targeted Vedanta's London headquarters (see Kumar 2014).

A long legal campaign highlighting violations of the Forest Rights Act and risks to the region's intact biodiversity met success in 2013 when the Supreme Court questioned the impacts of bauxite mining in Niyamgiri⁵¹. The judgement laid the grounds for India's first environmental referendum by directing the state government to hold *Gram Sabhas* to let Adivasi Kondh communities decide whether mining will harm their religious and cultural rights. All of the twelve villages selected for the referendum voted against bauxite mining in their council meetings.

The idea of property associated with such livelihood struggles that are pitted against high stakes industrial development transforms into human rights, and the assertion of such rights through new legislation translates into expressions of democracy.

3.4.3. Environmentalism as anti-nationalism: Discourses of state crackdown

The state often responds to people's movements against high stakes projects by invoking the national interest clause and casting disaffected civilians as anti-national. The postcolonial state has retained the colonial government's Sedition Law that was passed in 1870 to control the activities of freedom fighters, through section 124A of the Indian Penal Code (IPC). The current state uses this draconian legal measure to crackdown on mass movements against energy developments (Biswas 2016).

The other common political tactic is accusing movements against large industrial projects as being agents of foreign intervention. Raising the spectre of the foreign hand became prevalent since the national emergency in 1976 when Prime Minister

⁵¹ The same court had in 2008 dismissed the Environment Ministry's concerns and declared that development was necessary (see Kumar 2014).

Indira Gandhi passed the *Foreign Contribution (Regulation) Act 1976* (FCRA) to curb international interference in Indian politics from other political parties and non-political institutions.

Under the next two subheadings I discuss the movement against nuclear power in coastal Tamil Nadu and the Pathalgari ('stone slab') movement of Adivasi communities in coal mining affected regions of Jharkhand to uphold their constitutional rights. The two movements stand out as cases of extreme repression by the state. Their being labelled as anti-national reflects the pitted political-economic context from which today's environmentalisms arise.

People's anti-nuclear movement

The People's Movement Against Nuclear Energy (PMANE) against the Koodankulam nuclear power plant (KKNPP) on the coast of the southern state of Tamil Nadu has been described as one of the strongest demonstrations of non-violent peoples' power (Vandana Shiva, quoted in Moolakkattu 2014). The bulk of PMANE was made of local fishing and farming communities who were concerned over the project's impacts of their livelihoods and lands. Yet governments alleged foreign interference to justify a severe crackdown (Udaykumar, quoted in Subramaniam 2013).

The Indo-Soviet Union Koodankulam Nuclear Power Project was signed in 1988, but stalled soon after owing to the collapse of the Soviet Union. It was revived in 1997, with Russia supplying two nuclear reactors. With the advent of climate change, nuclear power has also been regarded as a clean fuel, which can meet India's growing energy needs (Kalam 2011). The proposal met with local opposition owing to the memory of Chernobyl where similar reactors had been used. The movement against the nuclear plant gathered momentum after 2001 when four more nuclear reactors were proposed with the aim of supplying power to all the four southern Indian states (Radyuhin 2002).

The main resistance came from fishing and farming communities who saw the expansion of the nuclear power plant as a threat to their livelihoods. The movement was able to connect with national and international organisations (Udaykumar 2004). The Fukushima nuclear disaster following the 2011 tsunami caused a fresh eruption of protests from coastal communities who had been severely impacted by the 2004 Boxing Day tsunami less than a decade earlier. A PMANE coordinator said:

People saw the scale of the harm that it can cause...in August 2011 people in the village of Idinthakarai went on a day long fast, from then on they decided to fast indefinitely till their demands were met. It was coordinated at a mass-scale. Over hundred people went on an indefinite hunger strike. Every day 30,000 to 40,000 people protested (PMANE coordinator interview 06/05/2018).

In 2012, a state High Court order gave the go ahead for the expansion of Koodankulam project. This event sparked the movement's most critical phase in which people laid siege on the nuclear plant as a last resort. The coordinator described the state repression that followed:

'The state government sent 10,000 cops, who guarded every access road to the plant, but the fisher folk took the sea route to the site. People protested in the sea, slept in cemetery, and buried themselves in the sand to camouflage. All food, including children's milk, came by boats because the police had blocked road access. This went on for three months starting on September 11. They planted 349 cases on 250,000 people; 9000 were charged with sedition, and 12,000 for 'waging war on the country'...We lost the battle in Koodankulam, but we won the war on nuclear in India...the debate on nuclear became a wildfire...no other nuclear plant has started since...In the end, ordinary fisher folk challenged India's mighty Department of Atomic Energy for the first time in 80 years...where is the foreign hand in this? (PMANE coordinator interview 06/05/2018).

Constitutional rights: Adivasi movement in Jharkhand

Increasing land alienation from resource mining, and diluted and weak implementation of laws that protect the special status of Adivasis triggered a mobilisation for constitutional rights in the forested parts of the eastern state of Jharkhand that is home to a significant Adivasi population. Even by conservative estimates, Adivasi's consisted over 40% of the 1.5 million people who had been alienated from their lands between 1950 and 1995 in Jharkhand⁵² (Anwar 2019b).

Although Jharkhand was carved out in 2000 as a result of a long history of Adivasi struggle over 300 years to protect identity, autonomy, lands and natural resources, the new state still weakened and disenfranchised Adivasi rights and livelihoods. The government attempted to weaken the power of *Gram Sabhas* in the *Chotanagpur Tenancy Act 1908* (CNTA) and *Santhal Parganas Tenancy Act 1949* (SPTA). Both these acts had been passed after long struggles in eastern India. The acts restricted mortgages and prohibited the transfer or purchase of Adivasi lands by non-Adivasis (Bharadwaj 2018b).

Acting as a land broker, the state government formulated the Land Bank policy to pool lands owned by *Gram Sabhas* to attract private companies (Bharadwaj 2018b). The phenomenon of land pooling often occurred without the free and prior informed consent of communities. An estimated 2100,000 acres of common lands that enclosed people's forestlands and sacred groves had added to the land bank without free and prior informed consent of communities to attract private companies (Anwar 2019a).

Through the Pathalgadi movement, communities set up stone plaques declaring the special status, rights and autonomy of Adivasis under the Fifth Schedule of the Constitution at the entrance to their villages. The slabs also quoted sections of the PESA and FRA that recognise *Gram Sabhas* as the basis for self-rule in Adivasi

⁵² The figure indicates land-displacements for the Adivasi majority region of the eastern state of Bihar that went on to form the independent state of Jharkhand in 2000.

dominated areas (Bharadwaj 2018b). The Constitution gives Adivasis primary rights over their natural resources of *Jal, Jangal, Zameen* ('water, forests, land').

Apart from human displacements, large scale coal mining in Jharkhand without Adivasi consent had caused extensive deforestation, reduced ground water levels, and increased conflict between humans and wildlife, particularly with herds of elephants whose migratory routes were broken by mining (Bharadwaj 2018a). The Pathalgadi movement asserted Adivasi sovereignty by demanding that companies and the state administration seek the *Gram Sabha's* permission to enter the villages.

The state responded to Pathalgadi by arresting the movement leaders, vandalising villages, and imposing sedition charges on 30,000 locals or approximately 10% of the population. Permanent military camps were set up in the Khutni district that had become the epicentre of Pathalgadi and where 86 villages had joined the movement (Anwar 2019b).

3.4.4. Right to dissent: How state shapes discourses of environmentalism

The state's attack on civil society, motivated by corporate-bias and made possible by strong-arm tactics to facilitate projects, is considered a major driver of environmental conflicts. The coordinator of the alternative development NGO Kalpavriksh says:

What we are seeing today is an unprecedented scale of government crackdowns, even using terrorism as an excuse, on groups and movements...democratic spaces are now under attack, the current climate has left very little space for civil society organisations. The result is that the geographic spread of resistance movements has increased because of the desperation of governments and corporations. Infact if the state had not been behaving so extremely and in this obviously biased way, it would have been easy to ignore NGOs (Kalpavriksh coordinator interview 05/05/2017).

State hostility towards movements challenging the developmental agenda is considered to have acted as a catalyst to merge ideological differences within Indian environmentalism:

There is a long history of various ideologies working in their individual spheres; there was a territoriality so to speak with ideological difference between orthodox Marxists, Gandhians and Ambedkarites playing out. Of late there has been a greater realisation for the need for convergence from the side of ENGOs as well as community and grassroots movements, caused by the external threat of state repression. The new movements have to generate allies on the ground and cannot be purists in their values.

(Kalpavriksh coordinator interview 05/05/2017)

The greater spread of resistances around the country today is also attributed to increased awareness amongst communities as opposed to the 1970s and 1980s. A senior researcher at the Centre for Policy Research pointed out that since many projects being contested now are expansions rather than being greenfield sites, it has given communities the advantage of being more informed (interview 05/05/2017). As well as having greater information, livelihood movements nowadays have additional 'hooks' and 'stakes' to hang their claims through environmental regulations; the Forest Rights Act in particular 'has been an organising plank, giving people a voice' (Senior Researcher, Centre for Policy Research, interview 05/05/2017). The environmental space has become more democratised, allowing various and new contestations.

However, simultaneously, the state's corporate bias on the one hand and its repression of civil society movements on the other has created a crisis of democracy. Against this context, the notion of the right to dissent as a democratic principle has emerged as the metaphorical umbrella under which an entire landscape of resistance to neoliberal developments has found a common political objective:

In the current political and economic context, with democracy broadly under attack, when communities choose protection of environment and livelihoods over development, we tend to interpret their actions as them exercising their right to dissent (Senior Researcher, Centre for Policy Research, interview 05/05/2017).

The ideological umbrella of dissent as democracy for today's environmentalism of the poor asserts newfound legal rights of livelihood communities as radical democracy.

3.5. Analysis: From democratising development to dissent as democracy

The 1970s and 1980s were marked by a mosaic of resistances for fair distribution of resources that exposed the myth behind the one-size-fits-all model of development. Industrialisation that resulted in the displacement and loss of livelihood of vulnerable communities was justified through a selective notion of the public interest that was nevertheless largely accepted by civil society owing to India's state driven model of economic growth.

The scale of reconstruction of space through neoliberal development since the mid-1990s remains unprecedented in the 70 years of India's postcolonial development. India now stands third last in a global ranking of environmental performance (epi.yale.edu/epi-country-report/IND). State collusion with business interests generated new forms of accumulation by dispossession of vulnerable groups in the neoliberal era (Nielsen 2010; Bannerjee-Guha 2013). The expansion of corporate capital through primitive accumulation served urban elites and middle classes but adversely affected the need economy of the poor (Sanyal 2007). The poor were directly affected through loss of land, livelihoods and environmental degradation, and indirectly through lack of employment in the new economy owing to the jobless nature of contemporary growth. Consequently, privatised growth intensified what Levien (2011) describes as the 'various small wars against land acquisition' across the Indian landscape (p.66).

Contemporary environmentalism of the poor movements emerged and took shape against this conflictual background. The threat of loss of land and livelihoods via land grabs and the violation and dilution of laws, plays out as a continuous pattern in central India. Associated destitution continues despite India's high economic growth, making the Scheduled Areas in central India pockets of chronic poverty (Shah and Guru 2004). Deepening state bias towards private corporations and the cumulative effects of environmental (and social) destruction due to concentrated resource extraction pose a significant challenge to meeting both human rights for historically marginalised groups and environmental protections enshrined in the Constitution.

Today's movements both differ from and resemble previous-era movements. The latter were characterised by a neo-Marxist approach to resource justice and a political impulse towards democratising development. The justice that environmentalism of the poor sought through equitable distribution of natural resources is now enshrined as a series of rights in progressive legislations such as LARR and FRA that afford a legal basis to collective livelihood struggles. In some cases, the increased visibility achieved by today's movements through translocal and even transnational networks, make them more empowered than yesterday's movements.

Delegitimisation of the notion of the greater common good in the social sphere and the emergence of a new language of rights in the neoliberal era has had the double effect of rendering the struggles of ecologically dependent livelihood movements as both critical to avoid ecological crises and as radical assertions of democracy. India has passed a reasonably comprehensive suite of environmental legislations since the 1980s (Williams and Mawdsley 2006). However legal reforms for democratising resource-ownership and environmental protection have been marred by conceptual weakness due to an 'unwillingness to question the holy cow' of unlimited economic growth (Kothari 2004, p. 4724). The pitted context of today's environmental conflicts has radicalised the idea of property enshrined in progressive legislations. Today's struggles of livelihood against development, as

well as preventing the dilution of legislation and ensuring their proper implementation, have become a radical declaration of democracy.

The present mass movements protesting the disregard of special protections guaranteed under the Indian Constitution are labelled anti-national and violently crushed. The 2018 Human Rights Watch Report (www.hrw.org/world-report/2018) indicated that the government used draconian sedition and criminal defamation laws to curb the freedom of expression of government critics across a range of human rights issues, and not solely on occasions of environmental and Adivasi land rights conflicts. As the facilitator of projects that dislocate Adivasi and peasants from their lands for private gain, and as the suppressor of human rights of movements, the neoliberal state plays a double-role in shaping the environmentalism of the poor. State repressions have catalysed the formation of movement narratives that signify the actions of the environmentalism of the poor as dissent that is critical for democracy.

The extent to which movements have transformed in India's neoliberal era reflexively represents the extent to which the state has altered from its earlier socialist iteration while still retaining its postcolonial developmental agenda. The tension between the legal-democratic assertions of movements and the private interests that the state favours makes the political context of today's environmentalism a highly charged one. The socio-ecological impacts of two decades of concentrated economic growth can therefore be regarded as a crisis of democracy. Against this context of environmental and resource politics in the world's most populous democracy, assertions of livelihood, land and forest rights against India's neoliberal mission find a common bond under the democratic right to dissent roof.

3.6. Conclusion

The absence of climate change as a generative concern for livelihood movements indicates a fundamental North-South difference in today's environmentalisms. This difference points to a continued need to understand the distinctive social, political,

and economic contexts of environmental movements in the Global South. There is also need for a further specificity in understanding the context produced during India's neoliberal development that how it shapes the narratives of the environmentalism of the poor today.

Land alienation has remained as the strongest contention of the environmentalism of the poor, with the added difference that the movement's narratives today are shaped within a new legal democratic context of rights to land and livelihoods. Their narratives and significance are also determined by the double-movement of the neoliberal state. The neoliberal state is responsible for deepening environmental conflicts by favouring of contentious industrial projects and corporations while putting communities at risk. It then moves to counter livelihood resistances through repressive tactics. As in the first four decades of postcolonial economic growth, the environmentalism of the poor in neoliberal India has reconfigured concepts from both northern conservation and northern environmental justice. This is owing to its different historical context, differing political and economic realities from industrialised nations, and on account of the lived experience of India's subsistence communities with nature. I discuss these elements in Chapter 9.

Chapter 4

Radicalising coal in India and the politics of the Mahan coal mine

4.1. Introduction

Between 2011 and 2015 Greenpeace India mobilised forest-dependent communities in central India against a private coal mine allocated to a joint venture between Essar Power Ltd. and Hindalco Industries Ltd. Although it has campaign offices in countries in the Global South, Greenpeace is largely a Northern-based organisation with a centralised structure (Doherty and Doyle 2006). This was one of the international NGO's very few grassroots campaigns in India, and the only one that involved the mobilisation of a rural constituency. Greenpeace stated its objective as 'bringing out the true cost of coal, which is not just economic, but also environmental, social and spiritual' (Niyogy 2015, para 3).

The mobilisation of eleven villages in the Mahan forests, in a region known as India's energy capital, was a central plank in Greenpeace India's Climate and Energy (C&E) Program. Other elements in the Program included policy analysis around phasing out coal and expanding small and medium-scale renewable energy sources, rural electrification through a solar-micro grid project in the eastern state of Bihar (Greenpeace India 2013c), and policy-driven advocacy and urban mobilisation on air pollution.

The coal mine was stopped in March 2015 after the Narendra Modi government acted on a Supreme Court order that cancelled 214 coal blocks (including Mahan) that had been allocated without due process by the previous Congress-led government. A coal block is an area allocated for coal mining. However, the Modi government then began a campaign of suppression on civil society groups and

people's movements. It alleged that international environmental and human rights groups were acting at the behest of the foreign hand to stall India's growth.

Reports prepared by the government's surveillance agency the Intelligence Bureau targeted Greenpeace's campaign against coal mines and thermal power plants.

Greenpeace's anti-coal mobilisation and the hostility of the state's response brought out the deep contradictions of coal in India. While it is currently India's primary energy source, coal mining and thermal power generation is also responsible for a full-spectrum of social and environmental issues. Greenpeace's activism and the state's response offers perspective on how the global environmental agenda of climate action through stopping coal manifested in the socio-political context of a developing, coal-dependent economy. It also offers perspective on the risks of global environmental action in such a context.

This chapter traces the build up and eventual crackdown on Greenpeace India's anti-coal campaign across a dynamic political timeframe for coal between 2006 and 2016. Between 2004 and 2015 India both deepened and privatised its coal mining capacity for the stated purpose of being able to provide electricity to all Indians. Parallely, India declared ambitious targets to increase its renewable energy capacity and reduce the emissions intensity of its development in the Paris Agreement. The Greenpeace campaign was formed and operated within this contradictory context.

Section 4.2, the background, traces Greenpeace's activism in India before the Mahan campaign. It describes how a Northern focussed organisation situated its activism within a Southern political economic context. Section 4.3 describes the place of coal in India's politics and economy, the changing context of coal generation since neoliberalisation, and the policy and political decisions that underpinned India's recent coal growth. Section 4.4 traces the formation of the various stages of Greenpeace's advocacy, rural mobilisation, and urban public outreach against coal mining. The movement operated within the political milieu of India's 'coal rush' that was characterised by corruption, inter-ministerial

clashes, and blatant corporate favouritism within the Congress-led United Progressive Alliance government (2004-2014).

Section 4.5 traces the crackdown on Greenpeace during the first two years of Bharatiya Janata Party-led National Democratic Alliance government (2014-2016) and Greenpeace's fight-back through legal and public forums. Section 4.6, the analysis, discusses the debates by which coal was delegitimised in Indian civil society. Section 4.7, the conclusion, identifies how these discourses are critical to the global narrative against coal and climate change.

4.2. Background

Greenpeace officially registered in India in 2001, although India-based volunteers had staged anti-toxic waste dumping protests in the 1990s. One of its earliest successes came in 2006 when a global Greenpeace action forced France to recall the decommissioned warship *Clemenceau*, bearing high levels of asbestos, from being sent to the world's largest ship breaking yard in Gujarat on India's west coast (BBC News 2006). With the Bhopal gas tragedy still strong in public memory, Greenpeace strategically inserted itself into India's environmental debate with campaigns against toxic pollution by foreign corporations⁵³.

While Greenpeace's early successes tracked the international trail of hazardous substances that made third world countries a waste-dump for the first-world (Kiran 2006), its subsequent campaigns directly questioned India's developmental paradigm. Greenpeace's advocacy helped civil society to reframe debates on contentious issues such as genetically modified (GM) crops through challenging the official rhetoric of food security and scientific progress in agriculture (Mehta 2014).

⁵³ In one of its earliest Indian campaigns, Greenpeace, with local groups and the worker's union, exposed mercury contamination by and led to the closure of Unilever's thermometer factory that had relocated to Tamil Nadu from New York after failing to comply with US regulations (Hiddleston 2010).

Against official discourse that presented India's nuclear sector as environmentally benign and economically viable in the face of climate change (Doshi 2016), Greenpeace and other groups sought accountability for risky and publically contentious projects such as Kudankulam in Tamil Nadu (PTI 2016d). Civil society's efforts were met with various repressive measures by the state, including arrests and sedition charges, cancellation of the foreign-donations licences of organisations, travel bans on activists, and prohibitions on journalists from visiting protest sites (IANS 2013).

To assimilate its global climate advocacy with the Indian context, Greenpeace followed the strategic approach of first establishing credibility on the issue of India's energy generation and development through a focus on energy efficiency. Greenpeace India's 'Ban the Bulb' campaign triggered a consumer focussed government subsidy scheme to replace inefficient light globes with compact fluorescents (Commonfloor 2011). While Greenpeace usually frames its campaigns on moral grounds (Doherty and Doyle 2006), establishing the moral case against ending coal usage to tackle climate change proved challenging in the Indian context. This was partly on account of the allegiance of various Indian civil society groups towards the principles of common but differentiated responsibility (CBDR) in apportioning climate responsibility amongst the global North and South.

The Greenpeace Report *Hiding Behind the Poor* (Anathapadmanaban et al. 2007) redirected civil society's gaze on climate injustice away from the global divide and towards India's internal economic disparity. The report found that:

The considerably significant carbon footprint of a relatively small wealthy class (1% of the Indian population) is camouflaged by the 823 million poor who keep the overall per capita emissions below 2 tonnes of CO₂ per year (p. 2).

Arguing for intra-generational equity – in the same vein as the environmentalism of the poor – *Hiding Behind the Poor* asked the Indian government for a climate commitment towards its poor who would bear its burden disproportionately. The

report was discredited by the government and proved controversial even amongst civil society groups (Subramaniam 2015), but nevertheless sparked a debate about the need for domestic climate accountability. As in the case of other environmental issues in the Indian context, the case for reducing coal gained legitimacy amongst CSOs through the argument of social justice for the poor.

4.3. The contradictions of coal in India

This section discusses how the coal mining and power sector's planning and policies changed between 2004 and 2015 in the wake of privatisation, and how these changes contrasted with India's historic coal nationalism. This period coincided with the timelines of the 10th (2002– 2007), 11th (2007–2012), and 12th (2012–2017) Five Year Plans, which aimed for an ambitious growth rate of 8% of GDP⁵⁴ (Planning Commission 2013). Politically, this period covered two terms of the Congress-led United Progressive Alliance government under Dr. Manmohan Singh and the first two years of the first term of the BJP-led National Democratic Alliance government under Narendra Modi.

India's coal-fired growth engine was overhauled during this period through privatisation and massive increases in coal production and thermal power generation, engineering what can be called India's coal rush. This period also witnessed government corruption in the allocation of coal blocks to private corporations, clearly indicating favouritism in India's state-corporate nexus. The policies and politics, corruption and favouritism that characterised India's coal rush between 2004 and 2015, brought out deep and persistent contradictions between the intent and effect of coal-led economic growth in neoliberal India.

4.3.1. Coal Nationalism

The approach of resource extraction as a source of state wealth began in the colonial era. This economic pathway was intensified in post-colonial India by

⁵⁴ The 10th Plan achieved a growth of 7.6% and the 11th Plan achieved a growth rate of 8%. The 12th Plan set a growth target of 8.2% (Planning Commission 2013, p. V).

making minerals, particularly coal, central to economic development. Economic development in turn was deemed crucial for alleviating poverty (Ghosh 2016; Lahiri-Dutt 2014; Swain 1997). As India's most abundant major fuel (Martin 2015), coal formed the resource-backbone for post-independence development to build and strengthen public sector industries (Ghosh 2016).

India's first Five Year Plan identified increasing coal production and efficiency as a key requirement for a newly independent nation (Kohli et al. 2012). India's coal reserves are estimated at 276.81 billion to a depth of 1200 meters, concentrated in coal bearing areas (CBAs) covering large parts of the states of Jharkhand, Orissa, Chhattisgarh, West Bengal, Madhya Pradesh, Andhra Pradesh and Maharashtra (Ministry of Coal website, n.d.). Coal reserves are distributed across 27 major coalfields (Kumar 2010).

The development of minerals was prioritised to service the nine major public sector undertaking (PSUs) that produced iron, steel and heavy electrical equipment, materials that were vital for a newly industrialising nation. State discourse linked this development to the moral imperative for eradicating poverty through providing electricity to the masses. Electricity use is strongly linked to overall development and the improvement of specific indicators such as child mortality and female life expectancy in the Human Development Index (Ghosh 2016). An estimated 240 million Indians still live without electricity (International Energy Agency (IEA) 2015).

Coal was deemed as synonymous with the public interest owing to this imperative. Through a framework of laws and policies that gave coal legal eminence, India built a 'national coal economy' (Lahiri-Dutt 2016, p. 204). Policies and public companies kept the price of coal low with the principle aim of electrifying the nation and power sectors that were critical for growth (Gopal 2016). The *Mines and Minerals (Development and Regulation) Act 1957* (MMDR) reserved coal and lignite (brown coal) exclusively for the public sector by categorising them as major minerals. The *Coal Bearing Areas (Acquisition and Development) Act 1957* (CBAA) gave coal greater priority over other legislative land-uses (including the

inalienable land-rights of Adivasis in designated Scheduled Areas) in order to 'establish greater public control over the coal mining industry and its development' (CBAA 1957, p. 1).

Together, the CBAA and the (now repealed) *Land Acquisition Act 1894* (LAA) vested ultimate power in the state to acquire any land for coal mining (Lahiri-Dutt 2016). Coal nationalism undercut protection for Adivasis under the Constitution and contradicted the moral discourse around coal even in the decades before the liberalisation of the energy and coal sectors. The *Coal Mines Nationalisation Act 1973* (CMNA) consolidated the vision of the MMDR by bringing coal mining more systematically within the purview of the public sector and effectively made coal identical to the nation state. It stated:

No person other than the central government or a government company or a corporation owned, managed or operated by the central government shall carry on coal mining in India, in any form (CMNA 1973, section 3).

Coal mining and electricity production remained solely as state preserves till the 1980s. After the nationalisation of coal mines in 1973, mining was driven through the state controlled Coal India Limited (CIL) under the Ministry of Coal that was established in 1975. With seven fully owned coal-producing subsidiaries, CIL is the world's largest coal producer (Lahiri-Dutt et al. 2012). While CIL had complete monopoly over coal mining till the 1980s, after the liberalisation of the energy sector it still controlled 81% of India's coal production (Lahiri-Dutt 2016). Electricity generation was largely controlled by the state run National Thermal Power Corporation (now NTPC Ltd.), India's largest power company that was set up in 1975.

The overlapping layers of coal, forests and high concentration of Adivasi groups in India's coal bearing areas made coal mining the chief agent of disruption for forest-dependent communities. A major proportion of such people were not absorbed into the new coal economy. With their livelihoods and land gone, they were

compelled to subsist by collecting coal in lieu of forest products, creating what Lahiri-Dutt calls the 'subsistence coal economy' (2016, p. 204).

Central India's coal rich regions formed the centrepiece of India's coal led development. The Singrauli region that stretches across northeastern part of the central Indian state of Madhya Pradesh is called the energy capital on account of producing 10% of the country's thermal power. It is South Asia's biggest industrial area and contains some of India's oldest state-owned thermal power plants and coal mines⁵⁵. The 1960s marked the beginning of Singrauli's saga of displacements for large hydroelectric projects followed by thermal power⁵⁶.

Following a \$150 million World Bank loan, the state-owned National Thermal Power Corporation set up the Singrauli Super Thermal Power Project (SSTPP) in the early 1980s (Clark 2003). This was followed by the Vindhyachal Super Thermal Power Project (VSTPP) and the Rihand Super Thermal Power Project (RSTPP). Vindhyachal is India's largest thermal power plant with a current generating capacity of 4,760 MW (see www.ntpc.co.in/power-generation/). The Uttar Pradesh state Electricity Board (UPSEB) set up its power plant at Anpara, also in Singrauli. The Northern Coalfields Limited (NCL), one of the seven coal-producing subsidiaries of Coal India Limited, started nine open coal mines to supply fuel to the power projects. Nigahi, part of NCL's mine cluster in Singrauli, is one of India's largest open cast coal mines, providing fuel for India's largest thermal power plant (www.ntpc.co.in).

⁵⁵ Coal was discovered in Singrauli in 1840. Although Singrauli's first open cast coal mine was set up in 1857 during colonial rule (Chakravartty 2018), the region's coal deposits remained unexplored till the late 1960s owing to its relatively inaccessible terrain. Thereafter, an abundant water supply from the Rihand Reservoir made the prospect of mining coal in Singrauli, with its long stretch of open coalfields spread over 200 kilometres, lucrative.

⁵⁶ The construction of India's largest artificial lake the Gobind Sagar Reservoir, and the Rihand Dam, originally displaced 200,000–300,000 people from 146 villages in Singrauli (Clark 2003). With no rehabilitation policy in place, many families did not receive any compensation (Dokuzovic 2012). An estimated sixty per cent of dam-oustees resettled close to the reservoir site only to be displaced again during the setting up of the Super Thermal Power projects of the National Thermal Power Corporation (NTPC) coal mines of the Northern Coalfields Limited (NCL) in the 1980s (Sharma and Singh 2009).

Singrauli's ecology and society bore the brunt of this intensive development, and told a long story of human displacements, neglect and underdevelopment (Singh 2017). The region stands out amongst other displacement-affected landscapes from mega projects in India, both in terms of the intensity and frequency of land acquisition and the consequent displacements over five decades⁵⁷ (Sharma and Singh 2009). Adivasis bore the biggest brunt of Singrauli's industrial development, comprising nearly half the number of displaced people from large scale industrial projects from the 1960s onwards (Pillai et al. 2011).

4.3.2. Contradictions of 'neoliberal coal'

Policy changes to boost the production of both coal and electricity after economic liberalisation led to the entry of private players. The *National Mineral Policy 1993* (NMP) was announced to encourage private and foreign direct investment, and attract state-of-the-art-technology to India's mining sector. In the same year, through amendment to the *Coal Mines Nationalisation Act 1973* (CMNA), PSUs and private companies were allowed to take captive coal mines for power generation, washing coal or any other end use notified by the central government⁵⁸.

Following this amendment, the World Bank offered India a \$20 million loan for technical assistance in the negotiation of purchase agreements and privatisation of power projects (Marston 2011). But despite legislation changes, few allocations were made to private players till 2004 (Gopal 2016). The pace of privatisation of power generation remained slow in the first decade of liberalisation, with the bulk of India's thermal power capacity still being produced by NTPC Ltd. (Rosewarne 2016). As for coal mining, CIL remained the sole entity to commercially mine the fuel.

Since 2004 the Indian government rapidly allocated 194 coal blocks either directly to private corporations or state-private partnerships for captive-coal mining to

⁵⁸ A previous amendment to the CMNA in 1977 allowed captive mining by private companies engaged in the production of iron and steel and sub-leasing to private parties for coal mining. And a further amendment in the new economic era passed in 1996 allowed the mining of coal for captive use in cement production by private companies.

generate power. Where coal blocks were allocated to state-enterprises, private companies were contracted to undertake mining operations and other onsite technical projects⁵⁹ (Gopal 2016). Policy hurdles were removed to allow foreign-owned engineering companies to enter into coal handling and processing, further demonstrating the prominence given to the private sector in increasing India's coal production (Burke 2011; Rosewarne 2016).

Structural changes within the electricity sector paved the way for the entry of Indian corporate giants – Adani, Reliance Power, Tata Power and Essar Power – to generate electricity and sell it to the national grid (Rosewarne 2016). The *Indian Electricity Act 2003* (IEA) transformed the power sector that had been fully state-controlled till 1991. It introduced competition and choice and was passed with the intent of providing complete commercial autonomy to buy and sell power (Thakur et al. 2005). The setting up of super-sized thermal power plants followed privatisation and foreign direct investment in power generation, often with foreign companies as primary promoters (Ahmed 2010).

Private companies stand to profit through the corporate-owned-and-operated model of mining and electricity generation on account of the constantly rising demand for electricity, producing what can be called 'neoliberal coal' (Lahiri-Dutt 2016, p. 205). This exposed coal's contradiction in India in two ways. Since government rhetoric continues to equate coal to development, it now defines private operations as indispensable to national energy security⁶⁰ (Lahiri-Dutt 2016). And since the regulatory framework that granted legal eminence to coal in the days of complete state control remained intact after liberalisation, private corporations became beneficiaries of the state's subsuming of Adivasi and peasant lands and livelihoods.

⁵⁹ The government justified the allotment system of coal blocks on the grounds that allowing state-owned enterprises to exploit captive blocks would allow them to reduce their costs on coal, with the end result of passing the benefits to consumers through lower electricity costs. But it was found that the hefty payments that needed to be made to private contractors drove up expenses, making the prospects of consumer benefits negligible at best (Nileena 2018).

Whether thermal power generation in the neoliberal era was able to meet the objective of poverty alleviation through access to electricity stands contested. Electricity distribution in India follows the same pattern as income distribution – that of high inequality. Electricity distribution through the central grid system is largely concentrated in India's urban and industrial regions (IEA 2015) owing both to the challenges of extending the structure over vast distances to remote locations, as well as the inability of rural populations to meet the utility's cost of extending the grid. The poverty in such regions stands in sharp contrast to those regions that rapidly flourished in the neoliberal era.

Although Singrauli supplies electricity to sixteen Indian states, 50% of state's population lives below the poverty line (Singh 2015) and an equivalent proportion lives without electricity. Balanced against such structural and economic contradictions, the Indian government's mission, of 'Power to all by 2012' (Shahi 2003) that later turned into '24X7 and Power to all by 2022' (Waray 2018), through the boosting of neoliberal coal fired electricity generation, appears misdirected⁶¹. Under a coal-dependent growth scenario, an estimated 60 million Indians are likely to remain without electricity into 2030 (IEA 2015).

4.3.3. Engineering India's coal rush

Coal assumed greater significance after 2003 when Government of India (GOI) pronounced a mission 'Power to all by 2012' (CAG 2012). This prompted the planning commission to make a corresponding increase in coal production and power generation in the 10th and 11th Plans (i.e. 2002-12) that aimed to add 100,000 megawatts of generating capacity to the grid by 2012⁶². Further, from the

⁶¹ The former BJP Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee first launched a programme 'Power for All by 2007' and introduced a new scheme for rural electrification and another scheme for modernising the power distribution systems in 56 urban circles. Next, the Congress-led government set the new goal of 'Power for All by 2010', which subsequently changed to 'Power for All by 2012'. In 2014, Narendra Modi's BJP government set the new target of '24x7 Power for All' by 2019. The target date for '24x7 Power for All' now stands shifted to 2022, indicating the recurrent problems faced by subsequent governments to induce last mile connectivity and constant power supply to remote locations through the (primarily) coal-fired central grid, instead of prioritising investments in and establishing decentralised power-systems of renewables to reach all corners of India.

⁶² India added 21,180MW of generating capacity in the 10th Plan period, and 52,00MW in the 11th Plan period (Ministry of Power 2012).

10th Plan onwards, India set an annual economic growth rate of 8% of the GDP. This required a capacity increase of at least 8000-10,000 MW of annual power generation to bridge the energy deficit (Tongia 2003).

The increased coal demand for thermal power generation could not be met by CIL alone, leading to a suite of policies to allow private and other state-enterprise-based coal mining for electricity. An Expert Committee Report in 2006 on India's Energy Policy estimated India's coal production to expand to over 2 billion tonnes per annum to meet the energy deficit created by the policy demand. It recommended structural changes to the coal sector to meet the necessary electricity demand, by allotting coal blocks to other eligible players (including other public sector and private companies) for thermal power generation (Fernandes 2012).

After 2007, there followed a rush of approvals for thermal power plants, both new and those doubling capacities (IEA 2014). Up to 106 mega thermal power plants, being set up with private and foreign direct investment, were incentivised through the reduction of import duties on equipment by the Indian government (Ministry of Finance 2012). Many of the new approvals were for ultra-mega power projects, which were super-critical coal plants able to generate above 4000MW of electricity (Rosewarne 2016).

Finally, India's 12th Five-Year Plan (2012 to 2017) set a very ambitious national target of 100,000 MW of installed capacity, with coal as its mainstay (Pillai et al. 2011, p.1). The energy deficit implied an increase in domestic mining as well as coal imports. The chairman of Coal India said that the complete demand could not be met from domestic sources by 2020, despite India's domestic production growing at 8 to 9%. The target was double of what had been achieved under the 11th Plan, and made a deep impact on the landscape of Singrauli, India's energy capital (Saikia 2012).

Around the time of the opening up of India's power sector, NTPC Ltd. received a new \$400 million loan from the World Bank for the expansion of the Rihand and Vindhyachal power plants in Singrauli, making it the single largest borrower in the

Bank's history (Clark 2003). Singrauli also has India's largest private capital investment for super thermal power plants and coal mines (singrauli.nic.in). Between 2005 and 2015, privatisation brought massive corporate investments, estimated to the tune of Rs. 1 Lakh Crore (A\$20 billion), into Singrauli (Singh 2015). Some of India's largest private sector energy producers such as Essar, Hindalco, Reliance, Jaypee, Dainik Bhaskar, as well as public private partnerships (PPPs) led by state-governments have been operating mines and super critical thermal power plants in the region (Pillai et al. 2011).

The region's borders were redrawn in 2008⁶³ evidently to facilitate private coal mining and thermal power generation in a move critics considered similar to the creation of the new states of Jharkhand and Chhattisgarh (Singh 2015, 2017). Singrauli was expected to supply an additional 35,000MW of electricity to the central grid by 2017 towards fulfilling the gargantuan ambition of India's 12th Plan (2012-2017) to add 100,000MW of generation capacity. In addition to increased generation from state-owned plants, this was to be achieved through the addition of five private power projects that would add 13,000 MW of electricity (Singh 2017). Singrauli now has ten thermal power plants, five state owned and five private. Reliance Power's mega 3,960 MW private plant in the Sasan village in Singrauli was commissioned in 2013 despite Singrauli being designated a critically polluted area by the Ministry of Environment and Forests ⁶⁴ (Vyawahare 2018).

In 2014, the Modi government allowed state utilities to mine coal commercially. Commentators regarded this as the first step towards opening the coal sector for allowing private commercial coal mining (Singh 2015). India sent mixed messages internationally about its ambition to double its coal production by 2020 (Das 2015), and its intention to reduce its coal import dependency (PTI 2016c). Under

⁶³ The Singrauli region covers 2,200 square kilometres and is shared between the states of Uttar Pradesh (UP) and Madhya Pradesh (MP) in central India. A district bearing the same name was carved out as an independent entity from the Sidhi District in 2008 (Singh 2017).

⁶⁴ In January 2010, the MoEF placed a temporary ban on the expansion of industries in the Singrauli industrial cluster. No new coal mines were to be approved for environmental clearance on account of the region having been identified as a critically polluted area (CPA) with a pollution index of 81.73. But the moratorium was lifted only a year later upon assurances from central and state pollution control boards that they had started preparing action plans for controlling pollution (Pillai et al. 2011). All pending environmental and forest clearances, particularly for the new proposed coal and thermal power projects, could now proceed with safeguards attached.

these scenarios of expanded coal usage laid out by subsequent governments, India's Planning Commission⁶⁵ envisaged the dominance of coal in the energy mix to continue into the foreseeable future (Planning Commission 2015).

4.3.4. Adivasis and the environment deprioritised

The scale of policy changes led to unprecedented land grabs and land use changes across forested regions. A 2012 Greenpeace said that the government's ambitious plans could destroy over one million hectares of forest, an area twice the size of India's five largest cities combined, nearly three fourths of which has dense forest-cover (Fernandes 2012). Assessing the environmental impacts of proposed coal mines across 13 major coalfields, it said:

From 2007 to 2011, the coal mine lease area and coal production capacity have approximately doubled compared to pre-2007 levels. Virtually all new coal mining, and most of the planned power plants are located in central India, India's largest contiguous tiger landscape...the forest areas under discussion are also a critical livelihood resource for forest-dependent populations, including Adivasi communities...If India is to continue on its current path of increasing reliance on coal for electricity, it will mean the eventual fragmentation and destruction of large areas of forest habitat, the loss of vital connecting corridors for the tiger and other species, destruction of important watersheds for peninsular India's major rivers and the displacement and further impoverishment of large numbers of forest dependent communities (p. 5).

Between 2002 and 2011, the Ministry of Environment and Forests (MoEF) had already diverted 400,687 hectares of forestland, out of which mining and power projects contributed 38% (Fernandes 2012). Coal mining accounted for 65% of all forestland approved for diversion for mining by the Environment Ministry (CSE 2012). The targets for coal and thermal power generation of the 12th Plan

⁶⁵ The Planning Commission was an institution within the Government of India that formulated India's Five Year Plans. It was suspended in 2014 after the BJP government came to the helm, and the last two years of the 12th Plan, India's last Five Year Plan, was administered by the newly formed National Institute for Transforming India, widely known as the NITI Aayog (Planning Commission 2014).

suggested forest clearance on an unprecedented scale. Coal India's 2011-2012 report indicated that clearances still pending for 179 coal blocks and approval to divert 28,771 hectares of forestlands were hampering the government's power generation plans (India Today 2012).

But available statistics on clearances for coal mines and thermal power plants during the 11th Plan period proved such allegations to be false⁶⁶ (Gopal 2016). Not only had very few projects been rejected, but also the Environment Ministry had approved double the coal production capacity needed during the 11th Plan period. Clearances for coal mines and power plants under the 11th Plan period stood out as the highest number of projects ever cleared in any five year plan period in India (CSE 2012).

However, false narratives about regulatory hurdles from the industry, parts of the government, and the media, continued to dominate. A cover story in a national weekly magazine titled *Green Terror* accused the environment minister of jinxing India's development (Kumar and Buchar 2012). To remove hurdles in coal block allocations in forested areas, a government appointed high-level committee simplistically recommended that 'coal bearing blocks should normally be taken up for mining' (GOI 2011, p. 11), discounting the costs and consequences on Adivasis and other forest-dependent communities (Gopal 2016).

The arrival of 'a new flood of companies' during this period in Singrauli triggered a third phase of development related displacements⁶⁷ (Sharma and Singh 2009; Dokuzovic 2012). Five new designated super thermal power projects required an estimated 10,000 acres of land and threatened the future of over 4,000 families in the district (Sharma and Singh 2009, p. 65, Table 3). The mining sites for the new thermal projects were mostly in the last remaining intact forests in the region. The total forest area cleared in Singrauli since the days of nationally owned mines and power stations in the 1980s stands at an estimated 4,990.450 hectares, with only 18,548 hectares still remaining (Chakravartty 2011, table 1). By 2011, fifteen

⁶⁶ A Centre for Science and Environment factsheet showed that 181 coal mines (including those applying for capacity expansion) with a combined capacity of 583 million tons per annum had been granted environment clearance during the 11th Plan period (CSE 2012).

⁶⁷ Estimates places the total displacements in Singrauli since the district was formed in 2008 at 10,000 families from the acquisition of 15,000 acres (Singh 2015).

mining projects by large private corporations had already begun operations in Singrauli and the region had already lost one-third of its forest cover (Pillai et al. 2011).

Measures to expedite coal and associated infrastructure approvals under the Modi government since 2014 have included a more interventionist role by the Prime Minister's Office (PMO) through the Coal Monitoring Group (Siddhartha 2015). The Modi government also strengthened actions by the previous government that had exempted major infrastructure projects from having to obtain the consent of communities for forest clearance. Against the backdrop of the UPA government's 'Coalgate' scam, the Narendra Modi government had begun in 2014 by promising to better manage India's coal sector. It is yet to live up to this promise (Kohli and Menon 2020). The Modi government's decision to auction 50 new coal blocks in 2020 undermines India's efforts to transition towards clean energy, and exposes the contradiction in the government's approach of 'talking renewables and walking coal' (Roy and Schaffartzik 2021).

4.3.5. Corruption in coal block allocation

The Ministry of Coal had asked for the allotment of coal blocks to be made through a process of competitive bidding in order to avoid excessive gains to recipients on account of the price difference between coal supplied by CIL and coal mined from captive coal blocks. Competitive bidding would have established transparency and objectivity and ensured that the state benefitted from the coal rush.

A 2012 report of the Comptroller and Auditor General (CAG) of India revealed that in reality the government rapidly allocated 194 coal blocks from 2004 without any transparent assessment of financial capacity or technology (CAG 2012). In many cases coal blocks were provided in excess of the coal required for the captive project or at higher grades. Loopholes in the allocation process made coal a lucrative business for private players. In some cases companies had acquired coal cheaply from allocated coal blocks and then diverted them to power plants that were selling at market rates. In other cases, companies had taken coal blocks as

assets they had no intention of mining. This corruption in the UPA government's coal block allocations came to be known as the 'Coalgate scam'. It revealed the extent of the corporate-political nexus, with the state giving land and coal to corporations for free becoming one of the largest scams to be exposed in India (Inamdar 2013).

The CAG report attributed the real reason for coal shortages and the consequent energy deficit to corruption at the highest level within government. As a result of corruption in the allocation process, out of 86 blocks that were supposed to start production in 2010-11, only 28 blocks had started by March 2011. Many new thermal plants had been approved without coal linkages being established, causing India's coal imports to increase by 20% to 105.8 million tonnes to cover the coal supply shortage (Gopal 2016). The Environment Ministry pointed out how private players took advantage of the flawed process:

MoEF in the five years till August 2011 has granted clearance to 210,000 MW of thermal power capacity. However, most of these projects have not been commissioned...(this) looks similar to what we are finding in the case of coal allocation. Proponents have sought and taken environmental clearance as this provides them with land and water allotment as well (excerpt from Environment Minister Natarajan's letter, in Mazoomdar 2014a).

A report by the Prayas Energy Group showed that another 508,907 MW of energy projects (of which coal-based plants accounted for an overwhelming 84%) were at various stages in the environmental clearance cycle (Dharmadhikary and Dixit 2011). The report found that the pipeline projects could add three times more installed capacity in the 12th Plan period than India needed under a high-efficiency and high-renewable energy pathway. The Central Electricity Authority's (CEA) National Electricity Plan (2017-2022) indicated that owing to massive additions of renewable-based capacity in this period, no more coal-based capacity additions would be required till 2022 (Jai 2016). Under the circumstances, excess approvals created the risk of many incomplete projects turning into stranded assets that tie up large amounts of financial assets (Dharmadhikary and Dixit 2011).

New coal projects have significant externalities such as loss of common lands and livelihoods, displacement of communities, destruction of forests and local water systems⁶⁸. The biggest costs of the large-scale and reckless transfers of lands and coal resources to private corporations through the coal block misallocation were born directly by project-affected Adivasi and peasant communities and indirectly by the exchequer and Indian taxpayers. The CAG report estimated the loss of revenue to government, and consequent gain to private companies, at over A\$200 billion⁶⁹ (Mehdudia 2012).

4.4. Coal politics, Greenpeace and Mahan Sangharsh Samiti (2006-2014)

Reflecting the global shift in climate activism, Greenpeace's international climate strategy prioritised the need to stop coal mines by supporting local and community resistances. Although Greenpeace's policy advocacy in India had previously outlined pathways for phasing out coal, the new global direction lent credence to a direct intervention against coal mining. Greenpeace India's former Climate and Energy Campaign Manager said:

The frame changed from climate change to local issues after Copenhagen. 'Keep coal in the ground' became the new principle for designing campaign action. In India, there were all these interconnected effects from coal on forests, water, and Indigenous people. To do the local work, we had to look at this complexity. The new strategy became about talking about the variety of benefits of stopping coal (Greenpeace India former Climate and Energy Campaign Manager interview 03/04/2017).

⁶⁸ A study mapping the dependency of the poor on common property for their livelihoods indicates that 70-80% of non-timber forest-produce that constitutes a substantial part of forest-dependent people's household incomes, comes from common resources (Beck and Ghosh 2000).

⁶⁹ The CAG Report named twenty-five companies including some of India's largest power and resources corporations – Essar Power, Hindalco, Tata Steel and Power, Adani Group, Lanco, Vedanta group, Arcelor Mittal, Jindal Steel and Power – as beneficiaries in the private allocation process (CAG 2012).

The Greenpeace Report *How Coal Mining is Trashing Tigerland* (Fernandes 2012) set the context for the anti-coal campaign through a focus on coal mining's impacts in the central Indian forests, and their implications for India's international climate commitments:

At international climate negotiations the government has put forward the role played by India's forests as a CO₂ sink, and the potential for further increasing the carbon stock in forests, in an attempt to tap the REDD+ funds. As with the forest cover statistics, estimates of ongoing carbon sequestration by Indian government agencies are at odds with those of independent researchers. Independent estimates (in 2011) indicate that the carbon stock in India's forest biomass decreased continuously from 2003 onwards, despite slight increase in forest cover (ref)...A loss in carbon stock makes sense when looked at in conjunction with increased rates of forest land diversion (almost always natural forest) for industrial use over the last decade...mining and power projects account for bulk of (38%) of this diversion (p. 18).

The report focussed on the bigger risk of extensive forest loss from new coal projects and down to the specific and critical need to preserve forest corridors that offered vital connectivity between existing wildlife reserves in central India:

Taken together with a rapid acceleration in the pace of forest clearances for coal mining over the last decade, this implies the rapid destruction and fragmentation of large areas of forests within high priority landscapes that have been scientifically identified as crucial for sustaining tigers blocks...As fragmentation increases, corridors take on an even greater importance. Corridors and forest patches provide 'stepping stones' and continuity between larger forests...(but) lacking the higher degree of legal protection afforded by the Wildlife Protection Act of 1972...these areas are easier to 'sacrifice' (Fernandes 2012, p. 15).

A large section of the extensive Singrauli coalfields lay within two major tiger reserves that connected to sanctuaries further north through two wildlife corridors containing intact forest that ran parallel to each other. Coal blocks had been allocated both within the 10km stipulated buffer zone of these Protected Areas and in the major wildlife corridor through Dongraital-Mahan-Chatrasal-Amelia. The report recommended excluding protected areas from the purview of coal mining and not granting forest clearance to the coal blocks in the major corridors.

This focus on forests and coal in central India brought Greenpeace India face-to-face with challenges it had only tangentially or partially involved in earlier. The first was working with local communities and grassroots movements:

We were seen as an international NGO that was prone to 'doing some drama', stealing the limelight, and then leaving. We have come off as insensitive to community interests in the past. When we called for 40% ocean protection, we had been widely criticised. After the analysis when we chose Mahan as the place for our campaign, we had to decide, what would we leave the community with? We agreed that community forests rights (CFRs) should be in place for the villages around the coal block. CFR education would be the entry point to talk about coal mining (Greenpeace India former Climate and Energy Campaign Manager interview 03/04/2017).

The other was the vortex of India's coal politics during the Congress led United Progressive Alliance government (2004–2009, 2009–2014). The Mahan coal block became the bone of contention between the environment and coal ministries and the symbol of India's environment versus development debate. The debate leaned heavily on the side of the latter due to strong corporate interests as well as an egregious administrative mismanagement of coal resources. The following subsections trace the build up of this coal politics between 2006 and 2014, the shaping of the Greenpeace anti-coal movement along its contours, the extent of corporate influence in government decision-making and attempts to silence the

NGO, and the eventual Supreme Court judgement that called for the allocation of the Mahan coal block to be cancelled.

4.4.1. To go or not to go? The ministerial tug of war over Mahan

In 2006, the Ministry of Coal allocated the Mahan coal block in the Singrauli Coalfields in northeastern Madhya Pradesh to a private corporation for captive coal mining. Mahan Coal Ltd, a Rs 5000 crore (A\$1billion) joint venture between the London Stock Exchange listed Essar Power Ltd. and the Indian aluminium manufacturing company Hindalco Ltd. (Kohli 2012a). Essar Power is one of India's largest private thermal power producers with plants in three states. It is part of the Essar Group, a multinational conglomerate with investments across steel, infrastructure and energy in more than 29 countries across five continents (Ramanathan 2015). The Essar conglomerate is also highly leveraged, with a large debt mostly owed to state-owned banks in India (Kaushik 2015). Hindalco, the biggest producer of primary aluminium in Asia, is a subsidiary of the Aditya Birla Industrial Group, also a multinational conglomerate with operations in 34 countries across diverse portfolios ranging from aluminium, cement and telecom to insurance and lifestyle (www.hindalco.com).

Expected to produce 8.5 million tonnes of coal per year through a 1000 hectares open cut coal mine over a lifetime of 14 years, the Mahan coal block would supply Essar's 1000 MW and Hindalco's 650 MW captive power plants respectively (Fernandes 2012). The Mahan coal block was granted environmental clearance by the environment ministry in 2008 (Chakravartty 2011). However its forest clearance, a separate process, would prove contentious. Unlike the already developed northern parts of the Singrauli coalfields where forest cover has been fragmented, the Mahan coal block was located in undulating hills covered by thick tropical deciduous forests in the coalfield's southern part.

Mahan is one of Asia's oldest contiguous Sal tree forests and supports the livelihood needs of largely Adivasi communities (Kohli 2013). The Mahan forests also serve as a prominent tiger habitat and elephant corridor (Chakravartty 2011).

The coal block also fell within the catchment of two major perennial rivers. A 1000 hectares open-cut coal mine at Mahan would have cleared an estimated 500,000 trees, destabilised the watershed of the Rihand reservoir and jeopardised the livelihoods of 50,000 people across 54 villages (Padel 2016).

Three years after the allocation of the coal block at Mahan and a year after its environmental clearance, the Ministry of Environment and Forests (MoEF) and Ministry of Coal (MoC) established a joint criterion to designate which forest zones across nine major coalfields in central India were inviolate on account of their outstanding biodiversity values and which could be mined for coal⁷⁰. Mahan and six other coal blocks in the Singrauli coal fields were designated a 'no-go' zone for coal mining in 2010, based on this criterion that acknowledged the high quality of its forests. The 'go-no-go' exercise was part of a six-point agenda prepared by the two ministries to remove delays from the clearance process for coal mining while keeping environmental interests in mind (Kohli 2011; Kohli et al. 2012).

Both CIL and the coal ministry stepped back from the idea once the exercise was undertaken, upon seeing the extent of coal blocks rendered inviolate. The initial exercise identified 396 coal blocks as go areas and the rest 206 as no-go; the no-go coal blocks combined had a production potential of 660 million tonnes of coal per year. Within a year, following interventions from the Prime Minister's Office, and objections from the coal, power and steel ministries, the environment ministry had appended 70 no-go coal blocks to the go list (Down To Earth 2015). It has been pointed out that the MoEF's timeframe for lifting Singrauli's moratorium on industrial development (only a year after imposing it) coincided with several coal blocks in the region initially deemed as no-go areas being re-categorised as go areas⁷¹.

⁷⁰ The original suggestion to clearly demarcate forest regions that should not be opened up to coal mining came from the chairman of CIL, following which a joint declaration was made by the coal and environment ministers that approvals would not be granted for mining in the no-go areas (Ramesh 2015).

⁷¹ A list obtained by Greenpeace through the Right to Information Act 2005 indicated that the initial exercise had deemed 222 coal blocks in the central and eastern coalfields, which amounted to 48% of the area being classified, as no-go areas for mining approvals. But within a year, following inter-ministerial negotiations, the number of no-go coal blocks had come down to 153 (Pillai et al. 2011).

The coal ministry moved a cabinet note to make it mandatory for the environment ministry to approve every allocated coal block without taking into account the effects on forests, wildlife and the environment (Ramesh 2015). Publically, the environment minister spoke of a compromise and not abandonment of the go/no-go principle in order for the government to increase its coal production, in light of nuclear power becoming an area of concern and hydropower facing public opposition owing to its displacement issues (Press Trust of India (PTI) 2011).

Environment Minister Jairam Ramesh confessed to constant pressure from the ministry of coal and the PMO, as well as demands from the Essar and Aditya Birla chiefs themselves, for Mahan's forest clearance. In March 2010, the chairperson of the Essar Group, Shashi Ruia, wrote to Prime Minister Manmohan Singh that 65% of the plant had already been constructed and project delays would result in 'a huge loss to us as well as the country'⁷²(Chakravartty 2011, para 3). Meetings between conglomerate chiefs and the environment minister followed in May. Essar was also pressuring the government to clear two more coal blocks in a thickly forested no-go area in Jharkhand, because 'the projects are in a advanced stage of execution' (para 5).

Responding to the Prime Minister regarding Essar's concerns, the environment minister objected to fait accompli arguments for approvals. He asked why power plants were pre-emptively built before forest clearances could be secured, creating the situation for ministries to push 'done deals' (Ramesh 2015). His concern was that approving Mahan 'will open a Pandora's box which we should avoid at all costs' (MoEF 2011, p. 1).

In the interests of clearing Essar and Hindalco's coal block, an inter-ministerial exercise conducted by the Prime Minister agreed on six-points for allowing coal blocks in no-go areas to be cleared: whether land and water had been tied-up, environmental clearance obtained, orders for plant equipment placed, work at a site begun, substantial expenditure made or committed, and, finally, whether the

⁷² Investments of around Rs 3600 crore (A\$720 million) had already been made in the two power plants linked with the Mahan coal mine (Telegraph 2011).

plant was likely to be commissioned in under three years (Kaushik 2015). The extent of Essar's involvement in steering the government towards clearing Mahan was exposed through a series of emails leaked by a company employee turned whistle-blower in 2014⁷³. These emails formed the basis for a public interest litigation against Essar in the Supreme Court against Essar (Suresh and Sarin 2015).

The environment minister still declined forest clearance for Mahan. On the other hand, based on these revisions, the environment ministry granted Stage 1 Forest Clearance to coal blocks in the vicinity of Mahan that had also initially been placed in the no-go list⁷⁴. Clearance for mining or other major developments on forestland is mandatory under the Forest Conservation Act (FCA) 1980. The minister clarified that these coal blocks were either situated in already-fragmented forests in the already developed northern part of the Singrauli coalfields, or involved felling fewer trees. They were also situated outside the periphery of the undisturbed 20,000 hectares of ancient Sal forests within which the Mahan coal block fell. The MoEF had not issued any clearances within this area (Ramesh 2015).

4.4.2. Fait accompli approval

On a visit to Mahan, the Ministry's Forest Advisory Committee (FAC), a statutory body set up under the Forest Conservation Act (FCA) 1980, had found that the quality of the forests was far superior to what project proponents and the state government of Madhya Pradesh had disclosed (Sethi 2015). The environment minister said in a statement that the Ministry had rejected forest clearance for the

⁷³ One email exchange between two senior Essar officials included the summary note of the inter-ministerial meeting. Shashi Ruia wrote to the PM after the meeting asking to instruct the environment minister to hasten forest clearance (Kaushik 2015).

⁷⁴ Adjoining blocks included Chhatrasal, Moher Amlohri and Moher coal blocks allocated to Reliance Industries' Sasan Ultra Mega Power Project, Amelia North and Amelia coal blocks allocated to Jaypee Nigrie's thermal power project, and the Dongri Tal 2 coal block allocated to the state-owned Madhya Pradesh Mining Corporation (Chakravartty 2011). Coal blocks excepting Chhatrasal were cleared under the above exercise. The MoEF refused clearances for Mahan and Chhatrasal on grounds of high-quality forests. They were subsequently cleared by an Empowered Group of Ministers set up to clear roadblocks in coal block allocations (Kohli 2013).

Mahan coal block based on the exceptional quality of the local forests (MoEF 2011).

The site visit by FAC had also highlighted other risks that the proponents had failed to disclose. The Mahan coal block was located in a hilly terrain and mining would produce excessive mining overburden. Storing the overburden on the hill slopes would prove hazardous; it would risk silting the Rihand Reservoir and the two rivers on which the region's farming and industrial sectors depend (Chakravartty 2011). The Environment Ministry recommended the Sohagpur coalfield in the neighbouring Shahdol district, where 70% of the coal blocks were in the 'go' list, as an alternative fuel source for Essar's thermal plant (Ramesh, p. 33).

Correspondence released by the environment minister showed that the proponents approached the finance minister asking for a quick decision on Mahan. In the meantime, the chief minister of Madhya Pradesh added to chorus for Mahan's development by announcing an indefinite fast to protest the central government's continued discrimination towards a 'backward' state by delaying the coal block approval, even though two companies had invested millions of dollars in the Singrauli region (Chakravartty 2011).

In 2011, the matter of the approval of the Mahan coal block was taken out of the hands of the environment ministry and placed with a high-level empowered group of ministries (EGoM) headed by the finance minister. The EGoM's mandate was to suggest solutions for regulatory hurdles to mining and industrial projects. The environment minister issued a statement on the ministry's website stating his definitive position on the controversy surrounding the Mahan coal block approval:

The power plants do not have the redeeming feature of being super critical units that generate 5-8% lesser emissions of carbon dioxide. By Essar's own admission, the Mahan coal block will meet the coal requirements of the two 600 MW units for fourteen years only. There is no coal linkage for the balance of its life, which could extend for another ten-fifteen years at least. I

am not entirely clear why such a good quality forest area should be broken up for such a partial requirement. A third 600 MW unit is planned as part of Phase II of the project for which the coal linkage has yet to be firmed up. I am unable to agree to consider the Mahan coal block for State 1 clearance. The Mahan coal block is therefore being submitted to the GoM for its consideration with a recommendation that an alternative coal linkage be provided for the two power plants (MoEF 2011, p. 4).

The EGoM formed a high level committee to suggest clearance measures for coal blocks in no-go areas. The committee's report declared the go/no-go exercise as uncomprehensive and without legal basis since it mapped only 37.5% of India's coal bearing areas, and concluded that the concept should not be applied while giving forest clearance to coal projects (Chakravartty 2011). Minutes of an EGoM meeting in May 2011 indicated an intergovernmental tussle between ministries on the issue of the Mahan coal block; while the environment minister argued against its approval, the power and home (internal affairs) ministers pressed for clearance (Kohli 2013).

The next day's media reports announced that the EGoM had approved coal mining in Mahan (PTI 2012). The decision demonstrated how easily the government's empowered approval bodies undermined expert and scientific evidence, and the position of one of its most crucial ministries. Following this decision, Stage 1 Forest Clearance was granted for Mahan in October 2011, based on 36 conditions including the completion of a range of studies and compliance with the processes under the Forest Rights Act (Greenpeace India 2014n).

Jairam Ramesh has been replaced as environment minister by then. The new environment minister reluctantly accepted the decision, noting, 'Despite reservations against the diversion of the dense forest land expressed strongly by the environment ministry at the GoM, and the fact that the entire civil work and construction of the plant is already complete after procurement of environmental clearance – and resulting inter alia in huge exposure to nationalised banks – Forest Clearance may be granted to the Mahan coal block' (Jayanthi Natarajan, quoted in

Sethi 2015). The minister's concerns on the approval process were expressed in notes acquired through Right to Information:

'Needless to say, it is crucial to avoid such classic fait accompli situations in the future in order to preserve the integrity of our forests' (Kohli 2013)

Leaked emails exposed the underhand means through which Essar had secured Stage 1 clearance for the Mahan coal block from the EGoM, including personal favours by providing employment to close associates and relatives of the finance minister⁷⁵ (Kaushik 2015).

The tussle between the economic and environmental priorities within the Indian government was further increased after the National Investment Board (NIB) was established in 2012, to clear large infrastructure projects above Rs 1,000 crore that were being held back by concerns surrounding land acquisition and environmental and forest clearance processes. The concept of the NIB was formally established through the setting up of the Cabinet Committee on Investments (CCI), a standing committee with overarching powers that could bypass the approvals process of the MoEF (Kohli 2012b).

With the granting of Stage 1 Forest Clearance, the stage for the playing out of Mahan's environment versus development conflict shifted from the upper echelons of power in India located in the national capital, New Delhi, to the villages surrounding the proposed coal block in the Mahan forests. In collaboration with Greenpeace, a local grassroots mobilisation came together under the banner of the Mahan Sangharsh Samiti in 2012 (Pillai 2012). From the nexus between the central government's ministers and the Essar and Hindalco CEOs, the focus now moved to the state-corporate nexus in Mahan, and how this affected the daily life of local communities, particularly the activities of Mahan Sangharsh Samiti. Finally, the

⁷⁵ The director of corporate relations at Essar had met the finance minister asking for an early date for the EGoM meeting on Mahan. The leaked emails showed that the finance minister had expressed annoyance during the meeting at the company's delay in employing his favoured candidates. The office of Pranab Mukherjee, UPA's finance minister and later the President of India, had asked Essar to provide jobs to three people, one of them his granddaughter who was offered an internship in Essar's London headquarters. Essar resolved the matter was resolved within days. The EGoM meeting approved Stage 1 Forest Clearance for Mahan.

spotlight now shone on the politics of the Forest Rights Act, its adoption by the communities, and its abuse by the state-corporation nexus.

4.4.3. Greenpeace and Mahan Sangharsh Samiti

Greenpeace used the FRA as an organising tool to engage people in the eleven villages surrounding the Mahan forests. The community started coming together to express their concerns at the potential harm to their livelihoods. They asserted what the law under the FRA stipulates – that forest clearances should not be granted till the process of recognising their individual forest rights (IFRs) and community forest rights (CFRs) had been completed (Kohli *et al.* 2012). The local administration and local company officials acted in collusion to disrupt the process stipulated in the FRA, through which the people of Mahan decided on the matter of mining in their local forests. In 2012, company-hired-goons disrupted village council proceedings in Amelia, the largest village in Mahan, to disrupt people's attempts to register their CFRs (Economic Times 2013). In March 2013, a village council meeting in Amelia to determine people's consent for mining was followed by a large-scale forgery of signatures. The incident of forgery was revealed much later through documents obtained by Greenpeace under right to information (Pioneer 2014)

Greenpeace and MSS took the matter to the minister for tribal affairs in the central government; the central minister directed the state government to conduct fresh village council meetings to determine people's consent and expressed concerns at the large-scale violations (Sethi 2015). While the state had committed a fraud at the Amelia village meeting, it had altogether avoided the community consent process in all other 53 potentially affected villages around the Mahan forests, indicating the extent of FRA violations (Greenpeace India 2014n).

Even as the tribal affair's minister asked for a new determination of people's consent for mining in Mahan, a new environment minister, Veerappa Moily, issued a final forest clearance for the Mahan coal block on the basis of the fraudulent village council resolution. The conflict between the tribal affairs and environment

ministries in the Indian government reflected yet another aspect of the inter-governmental conflict over Mahan. The environment minister's special favours towards Essar stood exposed when he allocated an oilfield to the energy conglomerate at 'dirt cheap' prices around the same time period of issuing the forest clearance for Mahan⁷⁶ (Press Trust of India 2014)

MSS filed a petition in the National Green Tribunal (NGT) challenging the validity of the final forest clearance for Mahan. The petitioners stated that forestlands had been diverted without any scrutiny, the findings of the Forest Advisory Committee had not been taken into consideration, and the coal mine had been approved without undertaking a comprehensive wildlife study and cumulative impact assessment for the region⁷⁷. Essar Energy was already on the NGT's radar, due to dangers from the collapse of a mud wall of the fly-ash-dyke of its power plant, near villages in Mahan (Greenpeace India 2014f). The state government responded to the NGT with an undertaking not to fell trees in the Mahan forests till October 2013.

However the company had already begun preparations to log the Mahan forests. The movement responded by forming human chains around the trees and sitting in the forests from dawn to dusk. Women had led the blockades in a manner common to people's movements in India. Women are likely to be the most affected by the loss of forest produce and firewood, and the loss of common lands for cattle grazing. The local administration and the local police sided with the company. The police raided the Greenpeace office in Waidhan and arrested Greenpeace and MSS members on the basis of false allegations (Greenpeace India 2014j). Under this assault, the NGT order and the state's undertaking brought temporary relief to one of the most fraught phases of the movement.

⁷⁶ As per the leaked Essar emails, in his previous portfolio as Minister for Petroleum and Natural Gas, Moily had kept close contact with the Essar Group's executives throughout 2013 (Kaushik 2015).

⁷⁷ The petition stated that apart from the Forest Rights Act 2006, the clearance for Mahan also violated the provisions of the *National Forest Policy 1988*, the *Forest (Conservation) Act 1980*, and the *Biological Diversity Act 2002* (Greenpeace India 2014f).

4.4.4. Targetting Essar, getting 'SLAPP'ed

The Essar Group is regarded as a better at 'environmental management', a code word used by the business sector lobbying (of politicians, bureaucrats and senior journalists) than financial management and is known to have extended special treatment across Party lines⁷⁸ (Kaushik 2015; Suresh and Sarin 2015). Greenpeace had challenged the state-corporate nexus in India, which was formed of deeply embedded personal favouritism and business interests, through its anti-coal campaign. As a result it became a target of both the state and the corporation.

The Greenpeace report *Trashing Tigerland* had named Essar Power and Hindalco, amongst others, as 'companies involved in forest destruction' in central India. Side by side with stepping up the community mobilisations in Mahan, Greenpeace also started an urban-focussed public campaign to expose Essar's role in destroying central India's ancient forests and tiger habitats.

The tiger character Sheroo was created as the face of Greenpeace's urban outreach campaign titled 'Junglistan' ('forest kingdom'), which raised awareness across major cities about the risks of coal mining in central India, and generated public support for a moratorium on coal block allocations in forests (Greenpeace India 2011). Greenpeace volunteers appeared at forums attended by the Essar CEO and environment minister Moily dressed in tiger suits, aiming to 'embarrass' and highlight the state-corporate entanglement (Greenpeace India 2014d). A Greenpeace activist spent a month in a tree in the central Indian forests to promote the campaign issue through social media (Lakshmi R 2013).

In January 2014, Greenpeace pulled a characteristic 'stunt action' by unfurling a 72 feet long and 36 feet wide banner with the message 'We Kill Forests: Essar' across the face of Essar Energy's corporate headquarter building in Mumbai. The banner also contained images of Prime Minister Dr. Manmohan Singh and environment

⁷⁸ The leaked emails revealed the BJP leader Nitin Gadkari who became Minister for Roads and Transport and in the Modi-Cabinet, as one of Essar's biggest beneficiaries. The emails revealed that Gadkari and his family had stayed on the private yacht of the Essar CEO Shashi Ruia during a trip to France (Suresh and Sarin 2015).

minister Moily (Greenpeace India 2014a). Greenpeace volunteers and trained climbers approached the building management disguised as a cleaning team for a fake company, climbed to the roof, and hung down with the banner. The banner and the message were visible for kilometres around (Kaushik 2015).

Twenty seven MSS members had joined the Greenpeace action. A total of 67 protestors that included Greenpeace staff members, volunteers and the MSS, were arrested after the action (Greenpeace India 2014c). The trial for the charges pressed by Essar continued in the Mumbai High Court for six years. Essar also pressed separate defamation charges against Greenpeace for Rs. 500 crores (A\$100 million), alleging that the ENGO had displayed false and malicious content on the banner and in pamphlets handed out at the protest (Legally India June 23 2014)⁷⁹.

Reacting to a Greenpeace campaign video on the Mahan forests that had been running in cinemas across India, Essar sought a blanket ban on any Greenpeace criticism of the project (Greenpeace India 2014h). It appealed for a removal of all content related to the company from Greenpeace's website and campaign materials such as poster, leaflets and pamphlets. Essar justified its targetting of Greenpeace's activism on the basis of the Intelligence Bureau (IB) reports that had accused Greenpeace of slowing down India's development (Greenpeace India 2014g). The Mumbai High Court even accepted the reports as critical evidence of Greenpeace's malicious intent towards the corporation in the high-stakes defamation case (Greenpeace India 2014b).

Essar attempted to extend its the 'gag and restrain' strategy towards Greenpeace's activities in Mahan, by appealing to the Singrauli District Court to prevent the ENGO from approaching within a hundred meters of the thermal power plant or the resettlement colony (of peoples displaced by the plant). The District Court

⁷⁹ The Essar Group also pressed defamation charges worth Rs. 250 crores (A\$50 million) on *Caravan*, a political and current affairs magazine, after it published an investigate report on the group's influence on politicians based on the whistle-blower emails (Ramanathan 2015). The article 'Doing the Needful: Essar's Industry of Influence' (Kaushik 2015) chronicled the underhand means through which Essar wielded influence throughout the Mahan coal block clearance process.

however rejected Essar's SLAPP (Strategic Lawsuit against Public Participation) suit against Greenpeace (Greenpeace India 2015a).

4.4.5. De-allocation of Mahan coal block

For Greenpeace and Mahan, the fight to stop mining took a fortuitous turn after the Supreme Court of India ruled against the Coalgate scam, and the Modi government subsequently de-allocated Mahan (and other) coal blocks from the auction list due to the 'inviolable' quality of their forests.

In September 2014, the Supreme Court of India delivered a judgement on the UPA government's coal block allocation scam, ordering the cancellation of 214 (out of a total of 218) coal blocks that had been 'illegally' and 'arbitrarily' allocated to private companies between 1993 and 2011 without following the due process of competitive auctioning (Rajagopal 2014). The judgement highlighted the findings of the CAG report, that instead of auctioning coal blocks to corporations and generating revenues, the government had issued several leases to companies owned by or connected to politicians. Even when coal blocks were allocated to state-enterprises, politically connected private companies still emerged as winners by entering into joint ventures (Nileena 2018). The ruling stated that:

This modus operandi has virtually defeated the legislative policy in the Coal Mines Nationalisation Act, and winning and mining of coal mines has resultantly gone in the hands of private companies (Supreme Court of India 2014, p. 159).

The Supreme Court judgement provided an opportunity to fix the coal scam by reforming legislation and prosecuting violators (Nileena 2018). The newly elected Modi government brought in a new legislation, the *Coal Mines (Special Provisions) Act 2015*, which mandated auctions for all captive blocks offered to private companies. It still retained the power for the government to allot blocks without auction to state-owned enterprises, but banned state-companies from forming any new joint ventures with private firms for new coal block allocations, or from

bringing them on as partners via mining-services agreements, though it permitted private firms to be brought in as contractors or subcontractors.

All extant joint venture agreements were dissolved after the Supreme Court ruling. Based on the new rules, the Modi government auctioned the first set of coal blocks to private companies in 2015. The auctions were characterised by aggressive biddings and the auction amount and royalty payable to six mineral-rich states has been estimated to be to the tune of Rs. 1 lakh crore (A\$20 billion) over the next 30 years (Jai 2015).

The risks involved in this new approach need to be understood in light of transformations brought to India's coal mining sector since 2015 under the Modi government, and its consequences on Adivasi and forest-dwelling communities. Although the system of auction in the 2015 Act appears as a transparent process, it essentially means that money will determine everything, and other social determinants including the consent of landowners, will become dispensable. India's coal mining sector has undergone a massive overhaul from the era of public sector monopoly, to allowing captive mining by private corporations for their thermal plants, to the most recent policy changes by the Modi government in 2018 allowing private and foreign corporations to dig and sell Indian coal⁸⁰ (Bharadwaj 2018b).

But in early 2015, the circumstances were slightly different. For Greenpeace and the MSS, the four-year struggle ended when the Modi government dropped the Mahan coal block from the first round of fresh auctions (Times News Network 2015). The decision to keep the Mahan coal block (one of the few to be kept off the auction list), announced in March 2015, came as a big relief to the movement that

⁸⁰ Since 2016, the Modi government has paved the way for commercial mining of coal and allowed 100% foreign direct investments in coal mining. Between 2015 and 2018, the Modi government has allocated 84 (24 auctioned to private companies, 60 allocated to PSUs) coal blocks. Twenty nine of these coal blocks have begun operations by 2019, while the others are awaiting a range of approvals or tied in conflict and litigation (Chatterjee 2019). The Modi government has proposed sweeping dilutions to tackle environmental, forest clearance and land acquisition related hurdles, most critically, the de-linking of the FRA from the forest clearance process for coal mines in order to bypass the process of community consent (Chatterjee 2019).

was hoping the ‘new government would throw the old rules out of the window’⁸¹ (Greenpeace India former Climate Campaign Manager interview 03/04/2017).

The BJP’s intervention brought the political dispute over Mahan and the immediate threat of mining to one of Asia’s oldest stretches of Sal forests to a halt. The movement in Mahan and its eventual success against coal mining stood out as ‘a model campaign for Greenpeace internationally, most certainly a first-of-its-kind in terms of organising at the grassroots in the Global South’ (Greenpeace India former Climate Campaign Manager, interview 03/04/2017). But it triggered another phase of the cycle of coal politics in India. This time, instead of the Mahan forests, Greenpeace would find itself at the heart of the conflict between environment and development in India.

4.5. State crackdown and fight back by Greenpeace

Anti-coal activism is spearheaded by US-based ‘green’ organisations and Greenpeace, which have formed a ‘Coal Network’ to take down India’s 455 proposed CFPPS (520 GW) amongst 999 globally...Since 2013, through front entities, Greenpeace has initiated protests in the Singrauli region (Madhya Pradesh) which produces 15,000 MW (projected to double to 30,000 MW) (Intelligence Bureau of India 2014a).

A report submitted to Prime Minister Modi’s office by India’s primary intelligence agency the Intelligence Bureau (IB) titled *Impact of NGOs on Development* accused foreign funded NGOs of ‘serving as tools for foreign policy interests of Western governments’ by running campaigns to support human rights and environmental issues in the country (Ranjan 2014). Over twenty-two listed organisations and networks, including international NGOs Action Aid, Amnesty and Greenpeace, were alleged to have collectively brought down India’s GDP by 2-3%. Activities ranging from anti-nuclear and anti-coal protests to campaigns against genetically modified food, agitations against hydroelectric projects and mega industrial projects in the eastern state of Odisha were labelled as anti-national.

⁸¹ In the lead up to the 2014 general elections the BJP had criticised the scam-ridden Congress government and promised action against corruption.

Though its main concern was cited as the misuse of foreign funds by NGOs in violation of India's *Foreign Contribution (Regulation) Act 2010* (FCRA)⁸², the report failed to demonstrate how organisations actually violated the law (Sarma 2014). The allegations appeared motivated by Narendra Modi's criticism of foreign NGOs and overlooked genuine evidence of financial violations in India's voluntary sector⁸³ (Mazoomdar 2014b).

The IB reports made an example of Greenpeace. The first report alleged that the organisation was a 'threat to national economic security' and was contravening laws in an attempt to change the dynamics of India's energy mix, and that Greenpeace only attracted domestic donations in order to mask its actual sources of funding. A second exclusive dossier titled *Greenpeace spearheading a concerted campaign against India's energy expansion plans* (Intelligence Bureau 2014b) mapped out Greenpeace's organisational network all the way from the global down to the grassroots, even mentioning prominent locals within the Mahan Sangharsh Samiti (MSS). It alleged that Greenpeace's activities in Singrauli channelled the pro-environmental policies of European governments and recommended its FCRA licence for receiving international funding be cancelled.

Created during the British Raj to spy on freedom fighters, the Intelligence Bureau continued in post-independence India without statutory basis or parliamentary and judicial oversight (Nigar 2014), helping governments to crush political insurgencies through intelligence gathering from the shadows. The IB reports served as tools for a government crackdown on NGOs and legitimised the impunity

⁸² The FCRA was first passed in 1976 under the twin conditions of a national emergency and the Cold War to curb the foreign hand in domestic politics by preventing political parties from receiving international funding (Sampath 2016). It was made more draconian in 2010 through the inclusion (amongst other amendments) of organisations of a political nature. The UN Special Rapporteur on the Rights to Freedom of Peaceful Assembly and of Association concluded that the FCRA 2010 is 'not in conformity with international law, principles and standards' (UNHR 2016). Further amendments in 2014 legitimised foreign funds to political parties, as long as they were routed through Indian subsidiaries, exposing double standards in the Law. Amendments in 2015 legitimised scrutiny over NGOs on account of national interest and required organisations to provide details of social media accounts.

⁸³ The 2013 report 'India's funds to NGOs squandered' by the Asian Centre for Human Rights (ACHR) exposed the favouritism and corruption surrounding the allocation of government funds to NGOs (ACHR 2013).

with which corporations like Essar Energy acted against local resistances like the MSS⁸⁴. The Modi government restricted international funding for eleven out of the twenty-two listed organisations on grounds of non-compliance with the FCRA⁸⁵ (Yadav 2014).

4.5.1. The witch-hunt and the fight back by Greenpeace

The Government of India attempted three strikes on Greenpeace India. Within weeks of the IB report leaks to the media in June 2014, the Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA) froze funding from Greenpeace International and the US based Climate Works Foundation into the organisation's Indian bank accounts. Greenpeace India obtained an order for the unblocking of international funding from the Delhi High Court in January 2015, which declared that the ministry's actions were illegal and unconstitutional (Burke 2015)⁸⁶.

In January 2015, the Greenpeace activist who led the anti-coal mobilisations in Singrauli was offloaded from a London-bound flight in New Delhi, and a look-out-circular was issued in her name. She was scheduled to present on the treatment of Adivasis in Mahan by the London Stock Exchange listed Essar Energy to a UK cross-Parliamentary Committee. The government's stated concerns were about Greenpeace presenting India in a poor light. Greenpeace yet again challenged and won against the government order (Mathur 2015a). The Delhi High Court's landmark judgement in March 2015 upheld the need for dissent in a vibrant

⁸⁴ The allegations in the IB report acted to strengthen the arm of corporations facing resistances from people's movements. Essar Energy submitted the IB reports as evidence against Greenpeace at hearings in the Mumbai High Court (Greenpeace India 2014k).

⁸⁵ This included international NGOs Greenpeace, Oxfam and Action Aid, smaller national groups like Indian Social Action Forum (INSAF), anti-genetically modified advocacy group Gene Campaign, anti-Monsanto activist Dr Vandana Shiva's organisation Navdanya, four regional groups protesting the nuclear power at Kudankulam in Tamil Nadu, and one opposing the 'Gujarat model of economic development'.

⁸⁶ The Court observed, "Non-Governmental Organisations often take positions, which are contrary to the policies formulated by the government of the day. That by itself...cannot be used to portray the petitioner's action as being detrimental to national interest". The judgement is available at: <https://elaw.org/in.gpindia.15>.

democracy (Justice Sakhder 2015), ruling that ‘contrarian views held by a group of people (who form a nation) do not make them anti-national’ (para 12.3).

The Indian government froze all of Greenpeace’s accounts, involving both foreign and domestic funds. It blocked the organisation’s online donation page, leaving no room to seek support. The reasons cited were those of a discrepancy in Greenpeace’s records in demonstrating proper usage of foreign funds. A statement by Greenpeace India’s Executive Director (Greenpeace India 2015c) warned that the organisation would have to close within a month. The statement said that the actions of the MHA:

... could lead to not only the loss of 340 employees but a sudden death for its campaigns which strove to represent the voice of the poor on issues of sustainable development, environmental justice and clean, affordable energy’ (Greenpeace India 2015c).

The Delhi High Court ruled in Greenpeace’s favour for a third time in May 2015, directing the MHA to unblock the domestic bank accounts (Mathur 2015b). Greenpeace’s FCRA licence⁸⁷, and its registration to operate in India were next in line for a government assault later in 2015 (Gopal 2015). Greenpeace took the case to the High Court in Chennai (where it is registered) and secured an unconditional stay on the cancellation of its registration (Greenpeace India 2015d), thereby avoiding having to completely shut down. The Court ruled in November that the cancellation of the FCRA licence was ‘unwarranted’.

The series of attacks disrupted Greenpeace’s activities. Staff worked without pay when all its accounts were frozen (Bhalla 2015). For the first time in fourteen years of campaigning in India, its survival looked doubtful (Greenpeace India 2015c). A smear campaign that paralleled the attacks portrayed Greenpeace as a foreign agent. A government affidavit to the Delhi High Court labelled the Greenpeace activist who led the mobilisation in Mahan as a ‘bad activist’ who

⁸⁷ The cancellation of Greenpeace’s FCRA licence was part of a mass cancellation by the government on grounds of violation of the FCRA; this step affected nine thousand of the forty thousand odd FCRA registered organisations in the country (Kaushal 2015).

testified before foreign committees against her own country (Narayanan 2015). To discredit Greenpeace's anti-coal activism, it alleged that Greenpeace was channelling foreign funds worth crores [tens of millions] of rupees into Mahan Sangharsh Samiti to mobilise the locals against coal mining (Nair 2015).

Greenpeace declared its donation sources and financial figures as a demonstration of transparency. It countered the 'foreign-agent' allegation by showing that seventy per cent of its funds came from Indian citizens (Sreenivas 2015). Despite budget cutbacks, Greenpeace was able to keep some significant campaigns afloat, and garner strong civil society support through these projects.

The 'victory' for the Mahan forests in March 2015 coincided with the Delhi High Court judgement against the removal of the of the Greenpeace activist from the flight to London. Greenpeace and its allies called these outcomes a victory for democracy wherein the right to dissent has been raised to the level of a constitutional right (Greenpeace India 2015b). Just on its own, the incident of the removal of the Greenpeace activist from the flight had attracted strong criticism from various sections of civil society as a 'brazen assault on a citizen's right to liberty and free expression that India has seen in decades' (Varadarajan 2015b, para 2.). The high-level media attention that followed the off-loading created a sympathetic platform for Greenpeace's activism, especially its anti-coal protests in Singrauli.

4.5.2. The crackdown in the context of the neoliberal state

The crackdown on Greenpeace came at a time when the social and environmental effects of two decades of rapid, resource extraction-driven development had begun triggering civil society debates about the deep corporate bias and erosion in public interest in economic growth. The government's attempt to label Greenpeace a foreign-agent as a means of disrupting its work was therefore met with strong criticism from civil society groups and people's networks (Vaidyanathan et al. 2015). Against the broader context of a crackdown on civil society dissent by the state, the courts also upheld Greenpeace's right to protect the environment and

livelihoods of vulnerable communities as a critical assertion of democracy. The High Court judgements rescued Greenpeace from the brink of collapse a total of six times in the span of one year (Greenpeace India 2015d).

However, since Greenpeace's legal success, further attacks on civil society organisations have shrunk the space for dissent in India. In December 2016, in a step deemed illegal by the National Human Rights Commission, the Modi government refused to renew the FCRA licences⁸⁸ of twenty-five prominent rights-based organisations on the grounds that the organisations had undertaken activities that were detrimental to the national interest, effectively negating their chance to continue functioning (Sampath 2016).

4.6. Analysis: Radicalising coal mining through critical democracy

Coal's entrenched power in India makes it a risky proposition to raise the difficult questions that need to be raised about the relationship between climate action and development (Edwards 2019). India's international policy signals about being a good climate player on the basis of an ambitious and rapid-scale development of renewable energy belie the underlying realities of its ongoing coal developments. Today's coal mining developments disproportionately benefit private corporations while disenfranchising vulnerable Adivasi and peasant communities, and destroying last remaining forests. Nationally, India's renewable energy development pathway remains disconnected from India's coal trajectory (Roy and Schaffartzik 2021) owing to coal's entrenched power. The severity of the crackdown on Greenpeace has exposed the contradiction between global articulations about a renewables transition and internal priorities of attracting foreign investment and continuing coal production for energy security:

Greenpeace and the government want the same thing, less coal, more renewables, so then why was it cracked down on? One obvious reason is

⁸⁸ The most prominent amongst these include the human rights advocacy and legal advisory group Lawyers Collective whose members have spoken out against the violation of human rights by state deployed forces in India's Maoist-insurgency affected tribal geography of Bastar in the mineral rich state of Chhattisgarh.

that the previous government but more so this government has a phobia of civil society organisations mobilising on specific projects and not just advocating on policy, especially when the work is connected with foreign funding. There is a hugely different implication of commenting on policy and mobilising on the ground (Independent journalist interview 12/04/2018).

As opposed to Northern environmentalism, which is characterised by professional ENGOs and movement networks that strategically target resource sectors, sectoral targeting as an activist strategy largely does not apply to India's people's movements and livelihood struggles. Livelihood movements are mostly constituted of an inter-connected web of local struggles to protect lands, livelihoods and forests from displacement and destruction. Where sectoral targetting has been applied, such as also in the case of the People's Movement against Nuclear Power (PMANE), the severity of the state's crackdown has demonstrated the risk of strategic mobilisations against energy projects. The state's tactic of labelling movements as foreign agents demonstrates a politics of anxiety around India's neoliberal economic growth:

A direct anti-coal approach might not have been a good idea. There's so much foreign funding involved in such projects, that the government's resorted to repression whenever it has sensed 'sectoral' targeting. There's lots of groups and money coming into India for anti-coal movements: Sierra Club who operate through Conservation Action Trust, Environics Trust, Legal Action Groups, etc. Very few attempt to directly mobilise against coal'. (Senior Researcher, Centre for Policy Research interview 05/05/2017).

The state facilitating private interests in coal mining and thermal power against the interests of vulnerable communities has fully revealed the contradiction inherent in India's extractive, coal-led economic growth. The high-level corruption and mismanagement in the coal block allocation reveals an extreme manifestation of this contradiction through crony-capitalism in coal's political economy. Greenpeace's anti-coal activism – through the grassroots alliance with MSS and

other tactics – negotiated the contradictions within coal’s political economic structures, while the crackdown served to further expose them:

Normally we do not work on coal, but now we will make an issue out of it. The context is not the same as before. Coal is now piling in the mines and coal plants are shutting down; it’s partly because of the slowing down of the global economy but largely because they recklessly built power plants in 2006. So we now have a huge spectacle of coal capabilities lying idle, coal idle at coal mines, while on the other side there’s a solar boom. You think they would have thought twice about targeting the NGO in such a high-profile manner from such a weak position? (Energy analyst and Greenpeace board member interview 12/04/2018).

The crackdown was indicative of the current state of Indian democracy, where economic development is driven by high-stakes foreign investment. Further, instead of the public purpose, economic growth is motivated by a bond between the business and political elites. Against this context, the activism of an international group like Greenpeace is regarded as an economic risk. It can bring international scrutiny to energy developments, and has the ability to influence global institutions financing industrial projects in India. Divestment campaigns, where activists appealed to investors on grounds of economic unfeasibility and in many cases violation of Indigenous consent to extraction, have proved successful in the global campaign to ‘keep coal in the ground’. The state’s crackdown serves as a reminder of the precariousness of global alliances and the challenges for global NGOs to operate within a southern economic context of growing anxieties around energy security.

High stakes in industrial projects owing to large foreign investments have made the context for today’s environmental conflicts highly charged. Environmental protests unfolding within the current context of favouritism (of corporations) versus disenfranchisement (of communities) see their actions as critical assertions of democracy. From the beginning of its Indian operations that roughly corresponds with the time frame of India’s neoliberal reforms, Greenpeace

critically inserted itself into India's environment versus development debate. Against the context of neoliberal growth's effect on democracy, particularly by the state's suppression of dissent, the High Court interpreted the significance of the Greenpeace-MSS resistance as a constitutional right. The significance of today's environmental protests and livelihood struggles in India were furthered as a consequence of Greenpeace's confrontational anti-coal politics.

In India, the issue of climate change has largely remained at the level of policy advocacy (Yla-Anttila and Swarnakar 2017; Swarnakar 2019). Activisms of the environmentalism of the poor have largely not drawn the links between coal and climate change. Their experience of environmental injustice has continued to be dominated by the risk of loss of lands and livelihoods from industrial development:

Climate change is not to be perceived as a grassroots issue. Greenpeace does not work on grassroots issues, especially livelihood issues. As an international organisation they make the connection between the big and the small picture, but on its own climate change would not have won the Mahan campaign. People talk about climate change in environmental circles, but groups helping to make changes and provide support on the ground do not (Kalpavriksh Coordinator interview, 05/05/2017).

In the absence of a mass climate movement in India's southern and postcolonial context of environmentalism, the strategic role played by an international NGO has helped to elevate dissent against coal mining's socio-ecological impacts, and anti-coal mining resistance through forest rights, to a national debate and towards international attention. However, it is probable that the Greenpeace-MSS movement would not have received such critical global awareness without the extent of the crackdown; offering a perspective on how environmental conflicts related to coal mining are a normalised affair in India. The media's concern about the attack on 'fundamental rights of an Indian citizen' after the removal of a Greenpeace activist from an international flight scaled up the significance of the resistance to coal mining at Mahan beyond the environment versus development frame:

If left unchecked, it (the removal) will become the thin end of the wedge, where the government will show its intolerance to dissent in this manner...tomorrow they will say 'I don't like an article, so let's get rid of freedom of press (Varadarajan 2015a, quote from TV interview).

Owing to the repression, the Greenpeace-MSS resistance became a symbol of human and democratic values in the pitted context of India's neoliberal economic development and the current political landscape. Consequently coal, which constitutes the resource backbone for India's postcolonial development, was publically questioned on grounds of the civil and democratic rights of Indian citizens. Kalpavriksh's coordinator says:

'On the contrary, even if they had not used the climate change argument at all in the movement along with the grassroots groups, they (Greenpeace) would have still won the fight in the real and in the moral sense' (Kalpavriksh coordinator interview 05/05/2017).

Allies have however regarded Greenpeace's narrative frames on coal, popularised through catchy slogans such as 'keep coal in the ground' and 'End Coal', as unrepresentative of a southern complexity of economic development. Greenpeace's two decades in India have not been without ideological and practical tensions with the broader civil society network on account of its perceived inability to nuance messages to the intricacies of the Indian context (Talukdar 2019b). The comments related to Greenpeace's 'sectoral targeting of coal' also point to a widely held view within the Indian civil society network about the organisation's seeming intransigence. Collaborators have chafed at Greenpeace's black and white positions, which at face value have betrayed a lack of reason, even a disregard, for the intricate contexts of economic and environmental justice in the South.

Paradoxically, Greenpeace's stand out activism in India, due to its foreign status and confrontational politics and tactics, and its grassroots alliance with the MSS,

served to expose the contradictions in coal's power structure. The involvement of a foreign NGO in targeting coal and its leading role in mobilising a grassroots resistance against coal-extraction revealed the double movement of the neoliberal Indian state, in exacerbating environmental injustices and then moving to repress dissent. The participation of an international environmental activist group in an alliance with an Indian livelihood movement against coal in central India, and the consequent state-crackdown, served to radicalise coal mining in various ways at various levels – from local democratic assertions of forest rights, to national issues of human rights and the democratic right to challenge mainstream development, to international climate change.

4.7. Conclusion

Coal is India's most abundant energy resource. It built the postcolonial economy through a centralised and state run structure of coal and thermal power production. Historically, India's developmental goals have linked coal powered electricity generation with poverty eradication. India's economic policies have elevated coal to the 'commanding heights' of the economy and made it synonymous with the national interest. This prioritisation continued even after the coal mining and thermal power generation sectors began to be privatised, making the profit of private corporations central to the national interest.

In the neoliberal era, when state machineries have driven massive land acquisition for private coal and thermal power generation, often in violation of its own laws on land rights and the consent of Adivasi and peasant communities, the postcolonial developmental logic of 'greater common good' through coal-extractive growth has been challenged. The Greenpeace-MSS activism offers insights into a certain political economic context that frames environmental injustices in the global South in the present era. In this context, the contradictory actions of the state towards energy security and climate action create an inherent conflict. Activisms that not only challenge mining's grounded issues – loss of land, livelihood and forest – but also ask the difficult questions around climate action and development are deemed risky to the national interest. The risk borne by the Greenpeace-MSS activism is

exacerbated because of its stand out politics. Links between climate change and coal extraction are not readily made by grassroots environmentalisms of the poor, and Indian civil society groups largely remain cautious about directly targeting the coal sector. Today's political climate of intolerance towards dissent in India makes this activism a relevant human rights struggle and offers insights from the South about the significance of multi-scalar anti-coal resistances.

Although coal retains its historic significance to both Australian and Indian states, the Indian case of anti-coal activism and subsequent state repression raises pertinent points about North-South divisions in political economic contexts, environmentalisms, and the state of democracy today. It raises concerns about the future of North-South civil society environmental solidarities, and the need for global climate activism's new approach to advocate for the strengthening of Adivasi and land rights in the Global South. I discuss this further in Chapter 9.

Chapter 5

An anti-coal movement in India's energy capital

5.1. Introduction

In March 2015 a grassroots mobilisation in the Singrauli district of the central Indian state of Madhya Pradesh saved the Mahan forests from the imminent risk of coal mining. The four-year struggle came to an end when a newly elected Indian government under Narendra Modi cancelled the Mahan coal block from the auction list. The cancellation followed a 2014 Supreme Court order that deemed the previous government's allocation of coal blocks to be arbitrary and corrupt. The local resistance Mahan Sangharsh Samiti (MSS) was formed of people from eleven villages fringing the Mahan forests – Amelia, Budher, Bandhaura, Suhira, Barwantola, Nagwa, Khairahi, Karsua Lal, Piderwah, Bandha and Jamgadhi. The largest village Amelia⁸⁹ has a population of 2200. Overall, the coal mine had risked the forest-dependent livelihoods of 50,000 people from 54 villages in the region (Greenpeace India 2014i).

The local movement was mobilised by the Indian arm of the international ENGO Greenpeace. Greenpeace activists began visiting Mahan in 2010 to start building awareness about forest rights amongst village communities. Greenpeace established an office in Waidhan, the district headquarters, in order to work in a sustained manner in the region. An alliance eventually formed between the previously non-politicised community at Mahan and Greenpeace. Together they ran a movement that ended with the cancellation of the Mahan coal block.

Communities in Mahan, particularly villagers from Khairahi, Bandhaura, Karsualal and Nagwa, first faced the prospect of displacement in 2007, when the state

⁸⁹ People from the first five villages came together in 2012 under the banner of the Mahan Sangharsh Samiti to assert their forest rights and oppose the Mahan coal mine. The remaining six villages joined the movement in August 2013 (Greenpeace India 2014l).

government acquired land for the Essar thermal power plant in 2007. Although on paper Essar offered a generous rehabilitation and resettlement package for the project affected⁹⁰, project affected people alleged irregularities in the process and cases of compensations not having being granted (Sharma and Singh 2009). The incident that finally shaped people's resolve to resist the coal mine occurred in 2013, when the local government and company officials forged villagers' signatures on a referendum on mining.

During my ethnographic research in Mahan, I found that the mobilisation of this rural constituency was motivated by a growing discontent from state and company interference in everyday life. Their resolve to fight was shaped by a newfound understanding of forest rights. This chapter highlights the process of radicalisation of the community and the subsequent formation of the local movement, through biographical accounts of six movement leaders whom I had repeated interactions with and interviewed during my four field trips to Mahan. All names have been changed to protect their identities. I also trace the movement's progress through analyses of resources, tactics, events, campaign moments and protest narratives.

Beyond the secondary sources of news articles, reports and publications, and primary sources from interviews and field notes, the research for this chapter has also been informed by postings by MSS members on Radio Sangharsh (resistance radio), a community portal, and diary entries chronicling the resistance made by one of the MSS leaders. The Greenpeace Mahan team referred to in this chapter consisted of the Greenpeace activist who led the local mobilisation, another campaigner, a communications officer, and two community engagement officers. This Greenpeace team used to be based out of Waidhan for several months in the year during the active stages of the movement.

² It offered market rates for the acquired lands, spacious plots for every adult in each affected family, and unemployment allowance of Rs. 4000 (A\$74) per month to all displaced persons between 18 and 50 years of age who cannot be employed at the Power Plant, till such time that the project succeeded in offering them a regular job.

Section 5.2, the background, summarises the history of mass displacements and ecological destruction in Singrauli through three waves of industrial developments from the 1960s. Sections 5.3, 5.4, 5.5, 5.6 and 5.7 describe the build-up and the various dimensions of the anti-coal resistance in Mahan, based on my ethnographic research. Section 5.8 analyses what the Greenpeace-MSS anti-coal resistance achieved against the backdrop of Singrauli's historic marginalisation of forest-dependent communities and the global climate imperative to 'End Coal!'. Section 5.9, the conclusion, highlights insights from this resistance for global climate activism's new approach.

5.2. Background

The success of the grassroots movement in Mahan in getting voices of villagers heard against the state-corporate apparatus needs to be understood alongside the Singrauli region's history of human displacement and ecological destruction through five decades of concentrated industrial development. The multiple waves of human displacements in Singrauli can be partly attributed to inadequate developmental planning, particularly the failure to demarcate coal bearing and non-coal bearing areas, so that people could plan their post-displacement settlement and access alternative lands and livelihood (Singh 2015).

In many cases, their predicament was exacerbated by an inability to claim compensation or jobs. Most rehabilitation policies only acknowledged officially recognised landowners. Failure to produce proof of ownership even though they had lived on the land for generations made Adivasis particularly vulnerable to dislocation without compensation. Coal India Limited's resettlement policy only considered persons with two or more acres of land as eligible for employment after displacement (Singh 2015). Such policies further exacerbated injustices from industrial developments.

In the 1980s, a protest movement of project-affected communities was formed under the banner of the Srijan Lok Hit Samiti (community welfare committee) to fight for the entitlements of the displaced (Dokuzovic 2012). A series of early

protests against the Northern Coalfields Limited and National Thermal Power Corporation (that later became NTPC Limited) were followed by a massive demonstration in 1988 of mostly Adivasis who were able to attract the attention of the media, civil society groups and the World Bank (that funded the thermal projects). The state and state-owned companies responded with remedial measures that were nevertheless meagre and ridden with corruption⁹¹ (Sharma and Singh 2009). The structural divide between responsibility for the environment and minority rights that belonged to the state and resettlement and rehabilitation that belonged to the companies and investors resulted in making affected communities particularly vulnerable to the process of industrial expansion.

Despite NTPC Ltd. routinely violating the World Bank's policy guidelines for rehabilitation⁹², the latter 'turned the other way' on the company's violations by ignoring local and NGO testimonials⁹³ (Dokuzovic 2012). Other deprivations of the rights of displaced locals included employing a majority of migrant workers at lower wages from even poorer areas such as Bihar, Jharkhand and Chhattisgarh at project construction sites (Pillai et al. 2011).

Since the days of large dams and state-owned coal projects, resistances like the Narmada Bachao Aandolan and later the National Alliance of Peoples Movement, and legal measures like the *National Rehabilitation and Resettlement Policy 1997*, and later the *Right to Fair Compensation and Transparency in Land Acquisition, Rehabilitation and Resettlement Act 2013*, had created rights for displaced people that did not exist before. Such efforts have however been undercut by a pervasive culture of state-favouritism towards industry and treating ecological sustainability and social justice with disdain in India's energy capital.

⁹¹Only 1050 of the 11,500 displaced persons received regular jobs after the 1988 protests (Sharma and Singh 2009)

⁹² As per World Bank guidelines, project affected families should have received free electricity, education and medical treatment, should have been guaranteed employment (however limited according to restrictive clauses of rehabilitation schemes), plus resettlement and rehabilitation packages. Further examples of human rights violations by NTPC Ltd. in Singrauli range from the company's bulldozers running over people's crops and homesteads to its dump trucks running over a protestor (Clark 2003), and high levels of corruption through officials charging bribes from displaced people for 'fake interviews' that did not result in employment (Kohli 1997).

⁹³ Misleadingly, when World Bank officials visited Singrauli in 1992, they referred to NTPC's land-based compensation policy as exemplary, although this was far from the reality on the ground (Kohli 1997).

Systematic violations of communities' rights and entitlements through decades of intensive industrialisation created acute and chronic unemployment and a lack of future prospects⁹⁴ (Pillai et al. 2011). *Coal Curse*, a Greenpeace fact-finding report on Singrauli concluded that the lofty aim of regulations such as the *National Mineral Policy (NMP) 2008* to improve the lives of communities in mineral rich industrial areas had not been able to improve the circumstances of Singrauli's marginalised residents⁹⁵. On the implementation of the *Forest Rights Act 2006*, although the Greenpeace fact-finding team was assured by the Collector of Singrauli that the new administration would ensure compliance, the report expressed concerns about the fundamental lack of awareness on the part of communities about their rights over forests⁹⁶.

Industrial pollution from three decades of concentrated coal mining and burning had a telling effect on Singrauli's landscape. Dokuzovic (2012) provides a sordid account:

Upon entering Singrauli, one is immediately struck by the overwhelming environmental damage, from the hardly breathable air to the blackened, ash-covered landscape. Both land and water have been fiercely and systematically polluted...Coal mining has led to dangerous coal fires, overheating of the land, clogging of water sources, soil erosion and loss of soil fertility. Some of the toxins released from coal mining are arsenic, lead, mercury, and radium, as well as uranium and thorium, which lead to radioactive contamination. The direct dumping of toxins has polluted the land, water and air with mercury and heavy metals. Deforestation has

⁹⁴ Landless project-displaced communities, largely Adivasi, received no compensation, and were left with no prospect of livelihood after the loss of shared natural resources such as forests, ponds, grazing lands, river beds and fisheries (Pillai et al 2011).

⁹⁵ The NMP, while streamlining the granting of mineral concessions, also aimed to develop a sustainable framework for the optimum utilisation of mineral resources and equally importantly, sought to improve the lives of people in mining areas.

⁹⁶ The report states that, according to the District Collector of Singrauli, although 4000 individual rights have been issued under the FRA between 2008 and 2010, with 7000-8000 other applications in the pipeline, only 64 community rights applications had been made, and hardly any granted, during the same period.

released greenhouse gases, aside from destroying the resources of local people and wildlife (para 8).

Toxic fly ash from Singrauli's thermal power plants flowed into the Rihand dam, and resulted in the clogging and contamination of land and water sources (Pillai et al. 2011). High concentration of toxic acidity turned some water sources into what locals called 'death water' that could corrode human and animal flesh on contact. The companies however disregarded the pleas of locals to build bridges across the toxic waters (Dokuzovic 2012).

Since 2006, private energy projects with captive coal blocks allocated in Singrauli's last remaining intact forests have portended a new complexity in the region's displacement saga. Forests are home to forest-dependent families that have lived on the land for generations and often without formal property titles (Sharma and Singh 2009). Although Singrauli's present landscape appears overcome by an energy juggernaut that makes any other vision impossible to conceive, just two generations ago the region's small landholders and Adivasis were practising forest-dependent and farming livelihoods (Pillai et al. 2011). Singrauli was carved out as a separate district in 2008 to facilitate private coal mining. The scale of industrialisation, particularly the extent and concentration of coal mining and burning, had destroyed Singrauli's social and ecological balance, making it neither the Switzerland or Singapore that governments had promised, but a site of daily struggles for survival and a symbol of dystopia⁹⁷ (Singh 2015).

5.3. Use and abuse of the *Forest Rights Act 2006*

Greenpeace's first step towards engaging the community at Mahan was about building awareness about people's forest rights, about the acts and provisions that require the state and companies to follow due process in seeking their consent

⁹⁷ While commissioning the Rihand Dam that began the decades-long journey of resource rich Singrauli's environmental destruction and social upheaval, Prime Minister Nehru had described Singrauli as India's Switzerland. An explanation of Singapore is contained in the analysis.

over mining⁹⁸. While the grassroots mobilisation realised their rights to contest loss of livelihoods in the face of impending coal mining in the region through the FRA, the state administration that strongly supported the project reverted to what has become a common practice of violation of the Act, by forging consent at village council meetings. How the state used and abused the Forest Rights Act 2006 made a strong impact on the local movement, its genesis and its tactics.

5.3.1. Forest rights as an organising plank

In the initial meetings organised in the villages around Mahan, the Greenpeace team engaged the community in a dialogue to understand how they understood their ownership over the forests. A survey of the community's relationship with the Mahan forests demonstrated their indispensability to local livelihoods, as well as a sense of disempowerment due to a lack of awareness of the new forest rights:

Every year during the mahua season I shut down my house in Amelia village and come to stay in the Mahan forests for about a month to collect mahua, which I sell at Rs. 17-20 (A\$ 0.31-0.36) /kilo. We also collect other forest produce like tendu leaves, chironji, harra, bamboo, mushroom etc. but we are now hearing that these forests will be given to the company for mining coal. If the government gives away these forests we have no other means to live and we will not even get any compensation because we have no rights over these forests

(respondent from Amelia, in Kohli et al. 2012, p. 14)

Given the potential of forest rights to empower communities in coal rich areas to protect their livelihoods from mining-related disruptions, the paper suggested that:

⁹⁸ The *Panchayat Extension to Schedule Areas Act 1996* (PESA) requires the consent of village councils 'before making the acquisition of land in the Scheduled Areas for development projects and before re-settling or rehabilitating persons affected by such projects in the Scheduled Areas'. The *Forest Rights Act 2006* (FRA) requires community consent and both individual and community claims over forestland to be settled before allowing the diversion of forestlands for mining to go ahead. This was made explicitly clear through a circular issued by the Ministry of Environment and Forests (MOEF) to all state governments (MOEF 2009). The FRA also extends the right to claim forest rights to other forest-dependent communities apart from scheduled tribes.

Even though tribal and other forest dwelling communities have been residing on their lands for generations, the lack of recognition of rights and historical oppression at the hands of the state or forest mafia has meant that many communities do not believe that they can assert their rightful claim on the forests and forest produce...The process of recognition of rights which includes getting informed, engaging in collective discussions and evidence-gathering, mapping and so on, would enable a change in this reality. It would allow for communities to believe in their rightful claims over forests. This presumably can translate into forest dwelling communities feeling the need to hold on to what they are able to recognise as theirs (Kohli et al. 2012, p. 8).

5.3.2. Forging of mining-consent by the local administration

The strong state-corporate nexus and the eagerness by governments to secure mining revenues play a significant role in causing violations of processes under the PESA and FRA for community consent (for mining) and forest rights. The forgery of community consent is one of the most common ways in which the local administration violates these processes to favour companies. The incident of the forgery of signatures at the *Gram Sabha* in Amelia village on 6 March 2013 proved to be a turning point in the resistance.

MSS members have described the forgery to me. Only a small crowd of 182 residents from Amelia village had attended the village council meeting for a referendum on the Mahan coal mine. The meeting was overseen by the head of Amelia village who supported the project and the local administrative officer. People's request to see the signed *Gram Sabha* resolution had been denied. The signatures of 1125 people, including two deceased and one jailed (during the referendum) were subsequently forged on to the resolution document that approved mining (Greenpeace India 2013a).

The episode became public knowledge only after Greenpeace obtained documents on the *Gram Sabha* proceedings through the RTI process (Pioneer 2014). But MSS members' suspicions had been raised that very evening after the *Gram Sabha*, on seeing the conduct of the local administrator and village chief. After the meeting, the administrator and the police went around the village forcing people to sign the resolution. But that still did not give them enough signatures. MSS members suspect that they forged signatures on a mass-scale later at night, when company officials were seen at the village chief's residence. Testimonials on Radio Sangharsh indicated their shock and betrayal at seeing their own names on the resolution document once it was obtained through the RTI. Dayanath and Ramlal travelled to New Delhi, and along with Greenpeace, testified before the central government's tribal affairs minister, about the forgery of the *Gram Sabha* resolution. The union tribal affairs minister criticised the state government for holding a referendum without the entire community's knowledge, and for the local administration's role in forging consent (Ghatwai 2015).

5.3.3. Mahan claims community forest rights (CFRs)

The Mahan Coal Limited (MCL) claimed that the majority of the locals supported the project. The CEO of MCL alleged that the coal mine was being delayed on the pretext of Adivasi rights, using the ploy of claiming forest rights:

There is not a single person or family residing directly inside the forest area of the Mahan coal block. Thus, in a strict sense, claims being made by vested interests are outside the preview of Forest Rights Act ... this is perhaps one of the unique cases in the country where in spite of there not being any displacement, resettlement, benefits amounting to significant sums, will accrue to villagers.

(MCL CEO Ramakant Tiwari quoted in Trivedi 2014, para 9)

Tactics of delegitimising the community's rights over the Mahan forests were coupled with attempts at physically disrupting the actual process of claiming forest rights. The village of Amelia first attempted to pass a resolution declaring their

rights over Mahan forests in a *Gram Sabha* on the day of Indian Independence, 15 August, in 2012. Local goons hired by the company threatened people and disrupted the meeting. Despite threats and intimidations, the three villages of Amelia, Budher and Suhira eventually managed to file for community forest rights (CFRs) by 2016.

5.3.4. The Company's tactics to disrupt forest rights

The union minister for tribal affairs had ordered that fresh *Gram Sabhas* be held in Mahan. The district administration set the new village council dates for between 16 and 23 August, 2014. MSS testimonials on Radio Sangharsh (radio resistance), the movement's web-based community radio, demonstrate how company agents bribed and intimidated villagers ahead of the meeting, including by distributing chicken and alcohol amongst the men and saris amongst women, and visiting people's homes to compel a vote for mining. One testimony said:

People from the company come to us in groups of three to four, and they tell us to participate in the *Gram Sabha*. They tell us that they will give us money, clothes and later, when the coal mines open, they will give us jobs

(Radio Sangharsh testimonial 28/08/2014)

The everyday acts of sabotage, violence, deceit and misinformation, by the company and local administration, demonstrates how the state-corporate apparatus dilutes and violates the FRA's objective of redressing the historic injustices towards Adivasi and other forest-dependent communities.

5.4. Formation of Mahan Sangharsh Samiti

The transformation of the people of Mahan into an organised resistance against a coal mine, and their motivation to challenge the state and the corporation, was steered by various imperatives. While threats and intimidations had strengthened their resolve, the forgery of signatures had broken their complacency. The six movement leaders presented overlapping yet distinct accounts of why they had

joined a fight to stop the Mahan coal mine, as well as decided to trust an international NGO who had never worked in the region before. My interviews with Narayan, Dayanath, Sunita, Deendayal, Ramlal and Raj made it evident that their personal journeys towards radicalisation had been gradual and incremental. The willingness to trust an external organisation had grown over time and in direct response to the growing threat of mining.

Narayan's first reaction to Greenpeace had been whether they would last in Mahan: *Yeh log tikenge kya? Pehle bhi bohot o ko dekha tha* ('will they last? I have seen other NGOs come and go, none of them stuck around'), he had wondered. Aged 30 and with a family of three school going children, Narayan is one of the few people from Amelia to have received a masters degree. In 2008 he had worked as a supervisor at the Essar thermal power plant, located four kilometres from Amelia. He had adjusted to the red-and-white-banded smoke stacks and the fly ash from the power plant. But the forgery proved to be a turning point. He quit his job after the incident, deciding not to be a *naukar* anymore. The Hindi word means servant or one who gives service, conveying a pejorative meaning for a jobholder.

Dayanath, two years older than Narayan and also from Amelia, used to harbour a deeper cynicism of big NGOs. He told me about an incident with an NGO representative from Bhopal, the state capital, which had left him wary. Although the person had won the community's trust, and been running a community development program in Amelia for six months, he suddenly departed and never contacted any of the locals again. At first he ignored Greenpeace's requests to join in the meetings. But a violent incident by company agents tipped him over to the other side.

MCL officials felt threatened by the NGO's presence in Mahan and attempted to sabotage its reputation. Company agents and family members of Amelia's village head took Dayanath and four other locals by force to the Hindalco office in Waidhan. Once there, they were threatened at gunpoint to sign a letter with baseless allegations against Greenpeace. However, the five locals managed to escape from the building when an internal scuffle broke out between the agents

and family members. After returning to Amelia, Dayanath asked Greenpeace to come and work with his community, promising to get others involved in the fight.

One of the more senior MSS leaders, Ramlal, a grandfather, had experienced the three waves of industrial projects-induced displacements in Singrauli, twice for the Rihand Reservoir⁹⁹, and a third time for the setting up of the NTPC thermal plant in Shaktinagar. They finally settled in Amelia.

There is nowhere else to escape from this menace! Why can't they dig coal out of the ground from the minister's bungalow in Delhi? Why my home, my forests? For the sake of mining for just 15 years, they want to destroy places where our gods and goddesses have dwelt for centuries?

Sunita, aged 25, from Budher village, is one of the very few women leaders in the MSS. She first learnt about the effects of coal mining in central India at an awareness camp for local youth in 2010 organised by Greenpeace. She told me that she was sent to the camp against her will by her father, and she struggled through the three-day program. When Greenpeace started mobilising in Mahan, her father once again forced her to attend the meetings. But she started taking her association with the MSS seriously after the company agents started paying regular visits to Budher village, attempting to convince people about the coal mining project.

Deendayal from Amelia, also 25, is a high school teacher. He identifies as from the Gond Scheduled Tribe. Deendayal also attended the Greenpeace camp in 2010. He was motivated to join the MSS from the beginning, on account of the historic experience of dispossession (of Adivasis) from the forests. Deendayal confirmed that people used to be ignorant of the FRA, and variously believed that the state, forestry department, and even forest guards, were the rightful owners of the Mahan forests. The first meeting with Greenpeace in Amelia helped to clarify his

⁹⁹ The government had misjudged the catchment area of the Gobind Pant Reservoir. People who had settled close to it after the 1960 displacement were faced with a second dam-related displacement in 1962, when their settlement areas were flooded by the reservoir (Pillai et al. 2011, p. 11).

own knowledge of the issue of forest ownership and the rights enshrined in the FRA. This understanding, combined with the knowledge of coal mining's effects in Singrauli from the educational camp, gave him the motivation to fight.

Greenpeace activists had been raising awareness about forest rights in Mahan since 2010. But mobilisation of the community into a resistance took longer, and was facilitated simultaneously through their growing trust in Greenpeace and distrust in the government. People from the five villages Amelia, Budher, Bandhaura, Suhira and Barwantola decided to formally come together as a resistance and join Greenpeace in stopping the coal mine in February 2012 (Pillai 2017). They came together under the banner of the Mahan Sangharsh Samiti (MSS), which means the Mahan resistance front. The other six villages in the movement – Nagwa, Khairahi, Karsua Lal, Piderwah, Bandha and Jamgadhi – joined a few months after the forgery incident in 2013 (Greenpeace India 2014). The logo of the *aandolan* ('resistance') consisted of a ring of dancing people surrounding a circle of peacock feathers. The MSS logo contains a mahua tree at its centre, drawn in the *Warli* Adivasi art style on a bright green background. The logo symbolised the protection of the forest by the community and was inspired by their understanding of forest ownership.

Rajji, a village elder from Amelia and the inspiration behind the MSS logo, confirmed what Deendayal said about the local understanding about forest rights. They used to think that the forests belonged to the *sarkar* ('state'), who could take them away from the locals whenever they chose to. At the peak of the conflict in 2014, when the company's contractors were preparing to log the forest, people in Amelia and Budher started putting up triangle-shaped green flags with the MSS logo outside their homes, showing their collective resistance to the coal mine.

Women risked losing even more from the coalmine, including grazing grounds for their cattle and collecting mahua flowers and tendu leaves in the forest to sell in the market. But most of the women in Mahan were unable to join the movement because of the lack of respite from a grinding schedule of daily work at home and in the fields. They also felt withdrawn in public, and hesitant to speak in front of

men at gatherings. The Greenpeace activist who led the mobilisation in Mahan had to try a different approach to enlist women. She told me that in the initial months she organised separate gatherings for women.

Once their confidence grew, women raised a variety of issues concerning their daily lives, including domestic violence, asking that MSS address the issue amongst its male members. Speaking against domestic violence thus became a regular part of MSS meetings. Over a time span of four years of addressing domestic violence within the MSS, two core male members transformed from perpetrators to champions against domestic violence.

The caste divide proved to be a contentious issue to tackle in the beginning. Although caste-reservations have persisted, I gathered from the accounts of the Greenpeace team that their rigidity, where upper caste members refused to eat at the homes of Dalit MSS members, has dissolved over time, as a sense of solidarity has grown from a shared struggle. Testimonials on Radio Sangharsh indicated how Amelia's upper caste *sarpanch* ('village head') and his family members harassed lower caste MSS movement members, and supported local company agents who threatened MSS members with murder and false charges. Such menaces strengthened solidarities across the social divisions within the movement, and built a shared discontent against the local authority that failed the interests of the majority of the people. When a Dalit member who was hosting a movement meeting in his courtyard was kicked and abused by the *sarpanch's* brother, all MSS members stood up against the violence.

The company set up a pro-mining front known as the Mahan Vikas Manch (MVM) ('Mahan development front'), to thwart the MSS's mobilisation efforts against the coal mine. Locals who were known to have been recruited as *dalals* ('agents') by the company, have claimed allegiance to the MVM. The MVM accused the MSS of holding up development in the region. The district administration empathised with the pro-mining agenda. It argued that mining and thermal power projects also brought schools and hospitals to 'backward areas' through the corporate social responsibility of companies (Chakravartty 2011).

I experienced an interaction between the pro-mining front and MSS members during one of my fieldtrips. A man on a motorbike blocked the path of the Greenpeace activist and local women as they were returning from the weekly market, claiming: '*Aap bahar se aate huye aur hamara vikas bandh kar dete huye*' ('you outsiders come into the region and threaten our development'). Following a well-practised strategy of tackling such incidents of intimidation, the MSS women took over the conversation at this point, telling the *dalal* that they opposed the coal mine since it posed a risk to their livelihoods and their grazing grounds.

Women confronting company agents is a well-worn tactic in grassroots people's movements. One of the frequently repeated jokes within the MSS is about Sunita intimidating the company *dalal* who used to come to Budher village to convince people about the benefits of the coal mine. The account of Sunita standing on the dirt track outside her village, shouting at the *dalal* to leave her village alone, used to generate banter at the MSS gatherings.

Despite the different degrees of awareness of forest rights, and of the willingness to claim them, the realisation that the state was acting against their interests while favouring the corporation, acted as a common catalyst to radicalise the village community in Mahan against the coal mine. Testimonials on Radio Sangharsh indicate that the state and company's interference in their daily lives grew significantly over a period of four years. Mutual trust and the willingness to collaborate with Greenpeace strengthened during this time, as a result of their growing disaffection with the state.

5.5. State-corporate nexus in Mahan

In Chapter 4, I discussed the questionable process of allocation and mining approval for the Mahan coal block that demonstrated the high-level nexus between Essar Power and the central government. The everyday interventions of the local administration, forest department officials, and the local police, in the life of the MSS members, demonstrate how the state-corporate compact operates on the

ground in a mining region in India. While accounts from the ground rarely reach the large media establishments in the big cities, in the case of Mahan, the presence of an international NGO lent visibility to such dealings.

The Greenpeace team and MSS members told me about how the police acted to disrupt the movement at the behest of the company's officials. Radio Sangharsh testimonies also confirmed that the most common form of disruption involved police intimidations against organising meetings. Arrests became a common feature during the movement's most critical phase in 2014. The central government's environment minister granted a final clearance for the Mahan coal mine in February 2014, despite the minister for tribal affairs having nullified the fraudulent mining resolution from Amelia. The locals, a majority of them women, had spread themselves out in the forest, to stop the company's contractors from marking and felling the trees.

The Greenpeace activist who led the Mahan movement recounted an incident when an MCL official accosted her in Amelia. He threatened her to stop mobilising the locals, boasting that he was the 'biggest hooligan in the area'. Another written account about the risks faced by women in the movement from company agents and local government officials said:

Forest officials and company agents tried to manhandle women from the MSS who had moved into the forest to peacefully stop the numbering of trees for felling. They were threatened and abused (including with sexual innuendos) and questions were raised regarding their character. The company agents morphed photographs of women in bikinis and threatened to publish it in the local papers. When these threats did not work, they went around showing those photographs to community members on their laptops, calling them *Mayamohini* ('seductresses'). The local member of the legislative assembly threatened women working in Mahan and challenged men to rape them. When they approached the police with complaints and evidence, not only were they sent back but also charged with false cases!

(Pillai 2019, p. 152)

I had a first-hand experience of how the local administration and the police disrupted the MSS's activities during my first field visit. On 4 April 2017, MSS organised a public hearing to redress the grievances of people displaced by the Essar thermal plant in 2008. People from the four villages Nagwah, Khairahi, Bandhora and Karsua Lal had been sitting on an indefinite *dharna* ('protests sit') in demand for their grievances to be heard. Acting at the behest of Essar Power, the administration resorted to desperate tactics to sabotage the event. The Greenpeace team received a phone call from the local police late at night before the next day's hearing, and were informed that a curfew had been imposed within a five-kilometre radius of the Essar power plant in anticipation of a risk to property. It meant that the hearing could not be held in the affected villages since they fell within the curfew zone. Police arrived at the designated venue for the hearing late at night, forced MSS members to pull down the tent that had been set up for the next day, and threatened them with arrest.

The public hearing finally went ahead owing to the resourcefulness of the locals and a high level of cooperation and trust between MSS and Greenpeace that made it made a quick response to the challenge possible. MSS members carried the tent material to a new location on foot and under the cover of dark to avoid being detected. The tent was ready before dawn. The convoy of cars carrying the panellists took a rarely travelled back-route to the new venue to avoid being detected. The panel, containing people's movement leaders and environmental lawyers, heard a range of grievances from land-displaced people of Mahan, and prepared an action report. Three weeks after the public hearing, three men and three women from Khairahi (one of the displacement-affected villages from where people had testified at the hearing), one of whom had an eight-month-old baby, were arrested and detained for five days. The grounds provided for their arrests, similar to previous such incidents of baseless arrests, were the obstruction of duty for public servants.

The incidents reveal an entrenched entitlement by local administrations and mining companies in an extractive hotspot to intimidate communities with

impunity. They show that governments wield the power to shape the destinies of entire landscapes as per their choosing, and the collusion between various levels of the state to seal the fate of communities residing in resource rich or resource cursed regions.

5.6. An unusual alliance and its resistance

Greenpeace has previously been perceived as beating a hasty retreat from grassroots issues, leaving communities vulnerable, making networks like the National Association of Peoples' Movements (NAPM) wary of trusting such an international NGO. India's grassroots movements have largely remained ideologically opposed to professionalised and foreign funded NGOs (Talukdar 2018a). But after a visit to Mahan, the leader of the Madhya Pradesh based People's Resistance Movement acknowledged that Greenpeace's work in Mahan told a different story from its previous work in India, since this time it had attempted to empower and organise affected people (Greenpeace India 2013b). This is part of the reason why civil society had overwhelmingly supported Greenpeace during the crackdown in 2015 (Talukdar 2018a).

Owing to their alliance with Greenpeace, MSS members participated in activities that could be considered unusual from a grassroots perspective. Twenty-seven men and women from Mahan participated in a Greenpeace banner-drop action outside the Essar Headquarters in Mumbai in January 2014 (Greenpeace India 2014b). The fact that none had travelled to India's financial capital before the activity and that most had never left the boundaries of their own state demonstrated that MSS members had taken a massive leap of faith to work in alliance with Greenpeace.

Narayan and Deendayal broke into peels of laughter recollecting standing outside the Essar headquarters in Mumbai, while 12 activists dressed in tiger suits unfurled a giant banner from the top of the building with the message 'We kill forests: Essar'. Sunita was standing inside the Essar corporate building. When an Essar official asked her why she had illegally entered their building, she turned the

question back, asking, 'why does this company enter our village without our permission?'

All the MSS participants in the banner-drop action were arrested and detained overnight, along with 30 Greenpeace activists and volunteers. The trial continued till 2018, needing 17 out of the 27 MSS members to undertake interstate travels up to four times a year for court hearings in Mumbai. Narayan treated the challenge of travelling for the hearings as par for the course; infact he wished he could have participated in more of such Greenpeace 'stunts'. He saw windmills for the first time on one of the many multi-day journeys in a crowded public bus from Amelia to Mumbai. When he asked co-passengers what they were and learned that they generated electricity from wind, he wondered why the government could not install windmills in Mahan instead of pushing coal mining?

Greenpeace and the MSS undertook considerable risks and were jointly implicated in multiple legal cases. There were five ongoing cases as of June 2018. One of the Greenpeace campaigners working in Mahan was arrested twice, and charged thrice on the baseless allegations of obstructing government officials from doing their duty, even looting and robbery. Two MSS members were also detained along with him. The arrests came within three months of each other in 2014. They were devised to thwart the movement when people started protecting the trees in the Mahan forests from being felled (Greenpeace India 2014c).

Dayanath's diary entries from this period mention that the community persisted with the forest blockades for up to five months. Sunita described the curious incidents that led to the arrests. One day, the company workers who were marking the trees for felling in the forest promptly departed at lunchtime, leaving behind all their equipment. Seeing that they had not returned, MSS members deposited the equipment at the police station. But at midnight, the police arrested two MSS members from Amelia, and two Greenpeace staff from Waidhan, without a warrant, and charged them with looting the company's equipment.

While the others were released the next day, the senior citizen Ramlal was detained for 28 days. MSS and Greenpeace protested this clampdown by organising a demonstration; people gathered in a human sign that said 'Essar Quit Mahan' in a large field. Eight hundred people in Mahan also held a candlelight vigil and a march. These repressions highlighted the community's daily struggles to preserve their ancestral forests from coal mining, and the state's corporate bias (Greenpeace India 2014m).

Beyond the obvious aim to stop the destruction of people's forests and livelihoods, the local movement's actions also reflected an element of dissent. Being aware of the repression of civil society groups since 2014. The second Intelligence Bureau report (Intelligence Bureau 2014b) that singled out Greenpeace's anti-coal activism also implicated the MSS leaders. MSS members understood that their fight to stop the coal mine signified a struggle to democratise development. Through a series of assertions on Radio Sangharsh, MSS challenged Greenpeace's unfair treatment at the hand of the Indian and asserted the need to preserve the space for dissent.

After the cancellation of the coal block, the Mahan resistance broadened its horizons by joining with the National Association of People's Movements (NAPM), an umbrella group of people's movements from around the country. In December 2012, MSS members travelled to the state capital of Bhopal for the 40th anniversary of the 1984 Union Carbide gas tragedy. Speaking on Radio Sangharsh on his return, Dayanath pleaded to his community not to allow a company without accountability to enter Mahan.

In 2014, Greenpeace organised mahua-collection camps in the Mahan forests for its urban youth volunteers, between the months of April and May, which is the peak season for gathering these flowers (Greenpeace India 2014e). The Greenpeace lead campaigner told me that the initiative was meant both as an act of urban-rural solidarity, and a fundraising initiative to help establish the MSS as an independent grassroots organisation. The people of Mahan have contributed a cluster of mahua trees in the forest as an economic resource to the MSS. The

movement can collect, dry and sell mahua flowers from their forest cluster to support their activities.

The Greenpeace-MSS alliance challenged the developmental paradigm by joining a chorus of rural and urban voices against coal mining, at a time when the public costs of India's rapid growth had begun to be debated. It strengthened the environmental argument for protecting Asia's oldest Sal forests with people's concerns for livelihoods and the rights to decide about their forests. It transformed, even if in small measures, the everyday experience of communities living in a place marked for destructive development by powerful private interests. The resourcefulness of individuals within the MSS and the institutional clout that came with the involvement of a global NGO all contributed towards achieving this.

5.7. A celebration of people's rights

I first visited Amelia in March 2017. On 31 March, the people of Mahan commemorated the second anniversary of their victory over coal mining in the local forests. The second anniversary celebration had been linked with international climate actions organised under the global initiative to 'break free from fossil fuels'. Inside the big tent setup for the event, a large yellow banner framing the stage read *Vishal Van Adhikar Sammelan* ('massive forest rights gathering'), indicating the centrality of forest rights in the lives and politics of the MSS movement.

Late springtime is the peak mahua gathering season for forest dependent communities in central India. Mahua trees are native to central Indian forests and serve as the economic and cultural lifeline for forest-dependent communities. Families are known to set up camp in the forests for weeks to collect the yellow mahua blossoms. The harvest is dried and sold for herbal and medicinal needs. Although a large crowd of over a thousand locals had gathered for the anniversary, the presence of far fewer women, at one fourth that of men, meant that they had gone to the forest to harvest mahua.

The bright green MSS logo was conspicuous on badges worn by locals, and on little triangular flags held by the children. Greenpeace signage was conspicuously absent. Solidarity for forest and democratic rights was demonstrated through the large turnout and speeches over four hours. The MSS leaders spoke about the need to stay united. One of the movement's most frequently used banners, that said *Loktantra Zindabad* ('long live democracy') painted in black on a yellow background, was displayed on the tent wall.

A blown up image of MSS members standing holding the banner under a mahua tree, used to hang in Greenpeace's New Delhi office. The photograph was taken to celebrate Mahan's victory over coal mining after the Modi government removed the Mahan coal block from the auction list on 30 March 2015. On that day, the people of Mahan had joined with other local people's movements to mark the victory as 'democracy day'.

Cancellation of the Mahan coal block in accordance with the 2014 Supreme Court order had brought immense relief to the Mahan community. Celebratory singing, dancing and feasting had continued through the night, after the government decision on 30 March 2015. The next morning, they made an offering at the hilltop shrine of *Dih Baba*, their forest god. The victory brought a sense of empowerment and confidence. *Loktantra Zindabad* became the MSS's most definitive slogan. It reflected the coming together of the environmental demands of an international ENGO with the people's rights over forests and livelihoods. For the time being, Mahan's old forests and its livelihood dependent people had repulsed the long arm of destructive industrial development.

Back inside the tent of the second anniversary celebration, the hot hours of the day and litany of speeches were frequently interrupted with slogans asserting people's forest rights under the Forest Rights Act. *Jangal hamara apka hai, nahi kisi ka baap ka hai* (the forests belong to you and me, not to the government or the company), was one of the most popular chants. People of Mahan have been intimate with the forests for generations, and have many tales by which to remember these connections. Rajji's face creased up with countless lines as he smiled in recollection

of childhood memories. He used to have an orphaned jaguar cub that his father found in the forest as a pet.

The assertion *Purkho ka naata nahi todenge, jangal zameen nahi chodenge* ('we will respect our ancestral land, we will not give up our forests') had grown to become an anthem for the movement. Women led the crowd in chanting the slogan in between the speeches. Based on an understanding that their historic connection with the forest is now recognised by law, the word *adhikaar* ('right') had entered the movement lexicon, and become the MSS's chief instrument against coal mining.

Various other banners displayed in the tent also expressed the centrality of forest rights for the movement: '*Jan Jan ka naara hai, van adhikar hamara hai*' (there is a people's chorus for forest rights'), and '*gaon gaon ki yahii pukaar, le ke rahenge van adhikar*' ('village after village will claim their forest rights'). Dayanath had put his musical skills to the movement's cause by creating compositions about the struggle. At the second anniversary, he and his band sang about the highs and the lows of the struggle. The crowd cheered enthusiastically when they sang about the forgery of signatures on the mining resolution in 2013.

I visited Mahan three more times after the spring of 2017. Each visit raised further uncertainty about the future viability of the people's movement due to a combination of factors: Greenpeace's inability to keep fully functioning campaigns running after the crackdown, the atmosphere of attack on protest movement under the Modi government and its attempts at diluting the FRA¹⁰⁰, as well as its violation in the field by the local administration. Could MSS members stay united when faced with constant interference and intimidation by company officials?

Although the Modi Government did cancel the Mahan coal block as being 'inviolable', it allocated the adjoining Amelia North coal block (also in the Mahan forests) to a public sector hydro corporation, to supply coal to the Khurja Super Thermal Power Project (KSTPP) (Tribune 2016). Yet again, the Indian government had failed to apply a common rationale in making decisions that are critical for the

¹⁰⁰ See Sethi and Shrivastava 2019.

environment and communities (Pillai 2017). The proposal risked the lands and forests surrounding Pidarwah village, located approximately 15 kilometres from Amelia, across dense forest (Sanghera 2020).

For Greenpeace, stopping the mine had proven a symbolic victory over coal in India. But the Mahan campaign had proven risky for the organisation, making it a primary target for the central government's attack on NGOs. Successive crackdowns and the freezing of funds from 2014 forced Greenpeace to reduce its activities and staffing (Talukdar 2019b). It reoriented its anti-coal climate activism by not attempting further community mobilisations, such as against the next proposed coal mine in the Mahan forests. It took the less risky approach of exposing the economic implausibility (and ecological impacts) of new coal-fired investments such as the Khurja thermal power plant, through high-level analysis reports¹⁰¹.

Greenpeace closed down the campaign office in Waidhan in 2018. Another attack on Greenpeace's funding by the Modi-government in November 2018 forced the organisation to close down most of its campaigns and let go most of its staff members. It now operates skeletally out of India (Talukdar 2019b). Members of the Greenpeace Mahan team have continued supporting the local movement in their individual capacities as MSS members. Whether Greenpeace would have continued collaborating with MSS after the risk of coalmining had been eliminated, towards long-term community development and sustainable livelihoods measures, remains indeterminate given Greenpeace's forced exit after government crackdowns. The state of play has left many questions unanswered about the future of Mahan and the MSS. The forests have been saved for the time being, but those already displaced by the Essar thermal plant are continuing to struggle for basic rights and employment opportunities in lieu of displacement (Sanghera 2020). The state of play also raises questions about the nature of new relations forged between grassroots communities in the Global South and international

¹⁰¹A Greenpeace analysis argued that the KSCTPP and its captive coal mine project was financially risky, unnecessary, and posed a great health risk through worsening air pollution in North India (Greenpeace India 2018). An analysis by the Institute of Energy Economics and Financial Analysis (IEEFA) showed that India's existing supply glut of electricity and the rapidly declining cost of renewable energy made the current project economically illogical (Buckley et al. 2018).

environmental actors, whether such relations can endure beyond achieving instrumentalist aims of End(ing) Coal, both due to fundamental mismatch of worldviews and risks of anti-coal activism.

Did MSS see that there were likely to be more battles ahead? Back at the second anniversary celebration, enthused by the festive spirit, Narayan told me that he was prepared to fight again. As the event drew to an end, the crowd gravitated towards the centre of the tent chanting *ladenge, jitenge* ('we will fight, we will win') in a rising chorus. A hot breeze had started blowing across the open plains. It carried the thick fragrance of mahua flowers that covered the trees and carpeted the reddish soil all around the tent. At that moment, the spirit of the people of Mahan, who had learnt about their rights and fought a coal mine to protect their forests, felt strongly reassuring.

5.8. Analysis: Significance of forest rights in India's coal capital

The visions that governments have promised through the large scale industrialisation of Singrauli have borne no resemblance to their ecological and social impacts on the ground. While announcing the carving out of Singrauli as a separate district in 2008, ostensibly to facilitate private coal mining, chief minister Shivraj Chauhan had promised to turn the region into India's Singapore. Narayan reflected that *Nangapur* was a more fitting description of what Singrauli had been reduced to. The Hindi word *nanga* means naked. Narayan's observation is a close approximation to *Bhikharipore* – the Hindi word *bhikhari* meaning beggar – that project affected people had referred to Chauhan's falsely promised prophecy in Dokuzovic's account of the cost of development in India's energy capital (Dokuzovic 2012).

Singrauli bore one of the worst brunt of India's developmental aspirations through three waves of mass displacements over six decades that reflected the changing paradigm of large-scale energy development. The aspirations of the central government transformed the region by resource extraction and coal mining-focused policies over decades. These aspirations were matched by the eagerness

of state governments to attract foreign investments and mining revenues in the neoliberal era. The state attempted to disrupt the possibility of an alternative outcome for communities to emerge, by fabricating the referendum process for mining under the Forest Rights Act.

The genesis of Mahan's conflict goes back to the year 2006 when the central government allocated the Mahan coal block through a corrupt auctioning process. In the same year the government also passed the landmark Forest Rights Act. When Essar's thermal plant was set up, it triggered a first wave of land related disputes in the immediate vicinity of Mahan. With the power plant came the fly ash and mosquitoes. Its constant hum drowned out the sounds of the forests around which people had woven tales for generations.

Communities in coal bearing regions had begun contesting the loss of communal and grazing lands to coal mining even without prior knowledge of the FRA. Infact the lack of awareness of the Forest Rights Act amongst communities in coal-bearing regions is one of the primary reasons for its very low implementation (2-3%) (Kohli *et al.* 2012). Greenpeace's strategic decision to mobilise people in Mahan through building awareness of the FRA had taken this reality into account. The Greenpeace Mahan team was able to engage and successfully mobilise the community, and use reflexive tactics such as mobilising women separately and addressing domestic violence and encouraging a conscious rejection of caste discrimination, to make the movement stronger and inclusive.

For the people of Mahan, a sense of ownership also brought pride in the forest's wealth and richness. I came across an account of the relevance of the Mahan forests for the locals in Dayanath's diary entry from 3 May 2014, titled *What do I get from the forests?* The time of the entry coincided with one of the peak moments in the movement, when the company was preparing to begin logging the forest, and MSS members, particularly women, were guarding the trees. He told me that he felt a sense of loss and regret at that time, that future generations would not have a chance to value the forests, and share the knowledge that had been passed down over generations. The reflection prompted him to write down the seasonal

fruits, flowers, and medicines from Mahan. His recording of the wealth of the Mahan forests is also captured in one of his protest songs against the mining company.

India's national rhetoric about double-digit growth and political arguments for large-scale energy generation remain alarmingly disconnected from the disaffection such projects generate on the ground (Pillai *et al.* 2011). The fate of the Mahan forests still hangs in the balance, with attempts to develop the adjoining Amelia coal block. This is the case despite coal's global decline, and even though not all the coal being mined in India is reaching the power stations, indicating a surplus extraction of coal (Gross 2019). The ability of the people of Mahan to hold on to their forest rights is the only possible means for an alternative narrative to mainstream development to emerge from Singrauli's coal-ravaged landscape.

In the evening after the second anniversary celebrations, I travelled with the Greenpeace team and the six MSS leaders to a spot by the Mahan River. To my remark that the bend of the shallow river, flanked Sal trees on both sides, was beautiful, Deendayal said conclusively, *Jo bhi haye, hamara haye*, ('it does not matter that it is beautiful, what is important is that it is ours!') Even if the victory ultimately proves to be a mere pause to hectic coal extraction that affects the ecology and livelihoods in Singrauli, it will most likely remain with the locals as a new experience of *adhikaar* and a language of justice that was a long time coming.

5.9. Conclusion

The social landscape of the region called India's so called energy capital points to the paradoxes of coal-led development in a Southern context. Even though the Singrauli region supplies electricity to six Indian states, several of its village-based communities still live without electricity. The long arc of large industrial developments, from large dams to state-led coal and thermal power production, to private coal mining and thermal power generation, tells a story of cyclical community dispossession and loss of livelihoods.

As the Mahan case study shows, although subsistence communities now have a democratic bargaining power in the industrialisation process, through legal rights in land acquisition and forest ownership, their rights are at a constant risk of being eroded or violated by the state-corporate apparatus. Historically, Singrauli's ecologically dependent communities could not determine their own future and were often forced to eke out an existence on the margins of the coal economy. As in other forested parts of India affected by coal mining, this has often meant illegally collecting the very substance in lieu of earlier forest products. Against this stark context, the grassroots resistance at Mahan is important on many levels.

As a successful rights-based movement in a region decimated by 50 years of coal extraction, the actions of the MSSS symbolised empowerment and historic land justice at the regional level. At the national level, Mahan's livelihood movement challenged the dominant coal-led development paradigm. Through the resources, visibility and support of an international NGO, they were able to draw attention to the true cost of coal on subsistence communities in India. Finally, even though climate change was not a mobilising factor at Mahan, the actions of the movement were directly relevant for the global environmental effort to 'keep coal in the ground'.

The various material realities, socio-political contexts, and claims of Southern frontline resistances and their critical differences from their Northern counterparts point to a diversity in anti-coal climate justice politics. This diversity needs to be heeded in order for an inclusive and just transition away from coal and towards renewable energy sources. To be inclusive of the challenges of people's movements in the global South will require reflexivity on the part of environmentalism's new approach, especially given the persistent malaise of land and Adivasi rights violations by mainstream industrial development, particularly coal extraction and power generation.

Chapter 6

Environmentalism in the era of Australia's minerals boom

6.1. Introduction

The resistance to the Carmichael coal mine in the Galilee Basin consisted of collaborations between a national environmental mobilisation, a local farmers' resistance, and opposition from the traditional owners of the land. In Chapter 2, I discussed the characteristics of an earlier Australian environmentalism. Although it contained various perspectives and strands, wilderness concerns tended to dominate over other manifestations and discourses of the Australian environment movement (see for example Eckersley 1992). Australia's resource exports boom at a time of exacerbating climate change required the dominant Australian environmentalism to recast its visions and politics in order to transform Australia's energy economy through stopping coal.

The state did not loom large in the lives of the primarily urban, tertiary educated citizens who were part of the environmental movement, as compared to Indigenous communities with whom environmentalists forged relations. However it still played a central role in how the earlier movement framed conflicts and advocated for environmental solutions. Understanding how state actions shape movement objectives and politics is even more necessary in the current era when Australia's economic pathway of resource-extraction and export, and the global need to keep coal in the ground to avoid climate change, are on a collision path. This chapter lays out the political and economic contexts for environmentalism, and Indigenous and farmers resistances that it builds alliances with, in the present resource boom era.

Section 6.2 traces the environmental and economic contradictions inherent in Australian federal governments during the mid-1970s until the mid-1990s, and how these shaped environmental governance and Indigenous land reforms. Section 6.3 traces the economic and political contradictions in the Australian state during the resource boom from the mid-1990s, which was characterised by unprecedented extraction of coal and gas extraction. It traces how these contradictions generated new risks and exacerbated old ones, for the environment, for Indigenous land rights, and for Australia's farming sector. Section 6.4 traces how these transformations shaped Australian environmentalism, how they created a new disaffected constituency amongst farmers, and how this period of extensive native title deal making between Indigenous groups and corporations transformed Indigenous-green relations. Section 6.5, the analysis, discusses the critical transformations to Australian environmentalism produced by the imperatives of Australia's resource boom and advancing climate change. Section 6.6, the conclusion emphasises the central role played by the relations between environmentalists, farmers and Indigenous native title groups, in sites of coal and coal seam gas extraction, for transforming Australian environmentalism.

6.2. Contradictions and unevenness of the Australian state

Even though the Australian state retained its centrality in either mitigating or exacerbating both environmental and Indigenous injustice, its actions had a different bearing on the two strikingly different demographics – environmental activists and Indigenous groups – who attempted to build tactical relations to respond to the state-corporate complex. The two parts of this section trace the significant environmental legislation and governance measures, and land rights reforms introduced from the 1970s to the mid-1990s before Australia commenced extensive deregulation under Prime Minister John Howard. It spans the Prime Ministerial terms of Labor's Gough Whitlam (1972–1975), Liberal-National Coalition's Malcolm Fraser (1975–83) and Labor's Bob Hawke (1983–91) and Paul Keating (1985–1996).

6.2.1 Environmental governance

Environmental issues gained greater prominence in Australia's political and social arena from the 1970s. Environmental conflicts erupted between state and federal governments during this period owing to the Australian Constitution's near silence on the matter of whether the Commonwealth or states are responsible for environmental issues (Christoff 2015). The federal government's approach towards addressing environmental concerns was marked by two contradictory movements. On the one hand increased calls for Commonwealth intervention in state developments among environmentalists were combined with its own attempts at extending various powers over states. On the other it sought institutional reforms that recognised the concurrent nature of federalism (Kellow 1996).

The resource rich peripheral states of Queensland, Tasmania and Western Australia in particular demonstrated a tendency towards what Kellow has characterised as 'colonial socialism' (1996, p. 138) even after federation, pursuing regional development at the expense of the national interest. It has been argued that colonial socialism was reinforced through the need for capital formation in these thinly populated regions, and the state's dominant role in penal colonies that were forerunners of many Australia states (Butlin et al. 1982; Eggleston 1932).

Labor Prime Minister Gough Whitlam (1972-75) sought to resolve the federal-state conflict over Lake Pedder in Tasmania through inducements for preservation, but eventually failed to intervene to prevent it being flooded. The Queensland government under Premier Joh Bjelke-Petersen had zoned 80% of the Great Barrier Reef for oil drilling and limestone mining. A prolonged 'Save the Reef' campaign led to the creation of the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park under Whitlam in 1975. His successor, Malcolm Fraser from the Liberal-National Coalition (1975-83), ironically¹⁰² used direct coercion¹⁰³ to stop sand mining on Queensland's

¹⁰² Not only was the Fraser Government reluctant to expand commonwealth jurisdiction over environmental matters, it also handed certain Commonwealth powers such as control of the first three miles of coastal water to the states (Cullen 1990).

Fraser Island (Kellow 1996). Under Malcolm Fraser the Great Barrier Reef became Queensland's first World Heritage area in recognition of its outstanding natural values in 1981. Labor's Bob Hawke (1983-91) further developed the Commonwealth's environmental activism by using its external affairs power to protect Australia's international commitments¹⁰⁴ to stop the dam on the World Heritage listed Franklin River¹⁰⁵ (see Kellow 1989). Passing the *World Heritage Properties Conservation Act (Cth) 1983* immediately on assuming power gave Hawke the legal means to stop the dam on the Franklin (Christoff 2015).

This process of intergovernmental escalation of conflict contributed to causing a weakness in institutional and policy reform at the state level in Australia. Consequently, Australia emerged both as a site of environmental conflicts and a laggard in international best practice in institutional reform¹⁰⁶ (Kellow 1990). The Hawke government took the dual approach of conflict resolution as well as regaining the national environmental agenda through the process of National Ecologically Sustainable Development Strategy to introduce sustainable measures in key industries (Christoff 2015). During the combined period of Bob Hawke and Paul Keating's Labor governments (1985–1996) Australia signed several international environmental treaties beyond World Heritage and passed subsequent national legislation to give effect to them (Christoff 2015). These included the *Protection of the Seas (Prevention of Pollution from Ships) Act 1983*, *Antarctic Mining Prohibition Act 1989*, the *Ozone Protection Act 1989*, *Hazardous*

¹⁰³ The Fraser government also secured World Heritage Listing for Fraser Island, and stopped oil drilling on the Great Barrier Reef by the Queensland government by establishing the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park and through World Heritage Listing.

¹⁰⁴ In 1982, the High Court upheld the ability of the Commonwealth to act under the external affairs power to honour international treaty obligations (in *Koowarta vs Bjelke-Petersen* 1982). Next, the decision in the Tasman Dam case (*The Commonwealth v. Tasmania* 1983), upheld the commonwealth's ability to use the races power, the corporations power, and external affairs power. In addition to previously confirmed power to deny export licences, this reading considerably empowered the Commonwealth to act for the environment in state jurisdictions.

¹⁰⁵ Although the Fraser Government nominated the southwest Tasmanian Wilderness that included the Franklin River for UNESCO World Heritage Listing in 1981, it was reluctant to use its external affairs power to stop the hydro-electric project even though it had become a national issue, being strongly in favour of the rights of states (Christoff 2015).

¹⁰⁶ Christoff (2015) argues that in Tasmania, where the success of Green electoral politics and the presence of the Greens in Parliament have been most notable, a diversion from the need to reform institutions and consequently a lack of success in institutionalising environmental values has been most marked.

Waste (Regulation of Exports and Imports) Act 1989 and the *Endangered Species Protection Act 1992*.

The two decades from the Whitlam government's term to the Hawke-Keating era witnessed a wave of national environmental legislation and policy. Whitlam adopted a number of statutes – the *Environment Protection (Impact of Proposals) Act 1974*, the *Australian National Parks and Wildlife Conservation Act 1975*, the *Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Act 1975*, and the *Australian Heritage Commission Act (1975)* – that served as the foundation of Commonwealth environmental authority (Kellow 1996). Although the Fraser Government also signed several international treaties, and maintained environmental progress, it attempted a nationally integrated strategic approach to environment policy through announcement of plans for a National Conservation Strategy of Australia (NCSA) in 1980 (Christoff 2015). Fraser also legislated the *Environment Protection (Nuclear Codes) Act 1978* and *Environment Protection (Sea Dumping) Act 1981*.

Alongside measures for a national takeover of the environmental agenda, the Labor government of Bob Hawke also moved towards a 'new federalism' through which 'the environment must increasingly become an area in which common ground and common purpose come to replace controversy and confrontation' (Hawke, quoted in Galligan and Fletcher 1993, p. 14). Environmental initiatives towards federalism included the development of national standards for air and water quality, the Landcare program, and the management of areas within the jurisdiction of the commonwealth and one state government, such as the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park and Tasmanian World Heritage Area (Kellow 1996).

Institutionalisation under Hawke and Keating through processes such as the cross-sectoral Ecologically Sustainable Working Groups effectively brought parts of the environment movement under the ambit of the state (Hutton and Connors 1999). The inclusion of the environmental agenda by business also created a mainstreaming effect on environmentalism that resulted in both opportunities and weaknesses. At the same time, its outsider strategies, whether that of indirect

influence or the direct demonising of the state, attested to the state's centrality in implementing better legislation and in environmental management (Doyle 2010).

6.2.2. Indigenous land reforms

What would redefine the politics of environmentalism during the subsequent resource boom – the power and influence of the mining sector over Australian governments – was already shaping the politics of Indigenous land reforms from the mid-1970s. The politics of land reforms from the 1970s to the 1990s serves as a crucial background to understand the contexts of present Indigenous resistance to mining, and the very different places that environmental activists and Indigenous groups come from to form alliances.

Since the 1967 referendum that led to the amendment of the Australian Constitution to include Aboriginal Australians in the census, the ability of the Commonwealth to legislate on Indigenous affairs has borne critical relevance for addressing colonial dispossession (Altman 2009b). A historic strike by Aboriginal stockmen in 1966, which began with families walking off the Wave Hill pastoral station in Northern Territory, ultimately triggered a movement for Indigenous land rights. From 1972 self-determination replaced assimilation as the central policy approach of the federal government towards Indigenous people (Altman 2012). The Whitlam Labor government's attempt at land reforms subsequently led to the passing of the *Aboriginal Land Rights Act 1983* (ALRA) in the Northern Territory under the Liberal-National Coalition's Fraser Government (Mercer 1987). The right to veto was made integral to ALRA based on the understanding that 'to deny aborigines the right to prevent mining on their land is to deny the reality of land rights' (Woodward 1974, p. 108). This made it Australia's most extensive land-rights regime¹⁰⁷.

The mining industry responded to land reforms through a 'relentless campaign to oppose land rights legislation of any kind and to dismantle the Northern Territory

¹⁰⁷ It was followed by other significant legislations for the return of Indigenous lands, in South Australia and New South Wales in particular (Mercer 1993).

Act' (Mercer 1987, p. 174). The political backlash from the industry's campaign in the biggest mining states Western Australia¹⁰⁸ and Queensland (see Gurr 1983) forced the Hawke Labor government to withdraw its election commitment towards national land reforms (Mercer 1993). Land rights activists regarded the Mabo decision (Mabo and Ors v Queensland 1992) that followed in 1992 as 'more acceptable solution to the quandary of aboriginal land rights' that came at no real cost to the Labor government (Foley 2013, para 4).

In the Mabo decision the High Court overturned Australia's founding legal fiction of *terra nullius* and ruled that denying Indigenous land rights contravened international human rights, particularly racial equality, guaranteed under the *Australian Racial Discrimination Act 1975* (RDA)¹⁰⁹. Even though the Mabo decision recognised an extremely limited form of native title that granted limited occupation not even akin to a standard lease, another mining industry campaign threatened that native title could create a 'national crisis'¹¹⁰ (Short 2007).

Paul Keating's government passed the *Native Title Act (Cth) 1993* following the Mabo decision. Property rights provided under the NTA's future acts regime were weaker than the ALRA since it withheld Indigenous groups the right to refuse consent to mining and did not guarantee statutory royalty equivalents from mining on their lands¹¹¹ (Altman 2012). The NTA recognised that native title, essentially a form of Indigenous title to land, may continue to exist in areas where Indigenous people still occupied and could display a continuing association with their pre-

¹⁰⁸ The backlash was particularly concerted in WA where the mining and pastoralist industries were a strong political force (Foley 2013).

¹⁰⁹ Australia enacted the Racial Discrimination Act (RDA) during the Prime Ministership of Gough Whitlam in June 1975 to accord equal treatment under the law to all Australians. It also reflected the *International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination*, adopted by the United Nations in 1969 and ratified by Australia in September 1975.

¹¹⁰ The scare campaign by the mining industry managed to spread the fiction of the 'backyard threat' – that people could lose their private backyards to native title – causing the Mabo decision to become a large electoral liability for any party supporting it. The opposition leader, Liberal-National Coalition's John Hewson, reiterated this argument in the run-up to the 1993 general elections. The Liberal Coalition and industry lobby's awareness of the effectiveness of dubious claims about risky situations in influencing public opinion is well regarded (Edelman 2001).

¹¹¹ In case of exclusive possession of land, native title groups had the right to negotiate with resource developers within six months of notification of a proposed mining-development project, after which the matter requires arbitration (Altman 2012a). The process of arbitration has largely proved unsympathetic to the wishes of native title groups (Corbett and O'Faircheallaigh 2006).

colonial traditional land, with the caveat that the rights of native title holders would have to yield in case of conflicts with non-Indigenous interests.

A limited national land rights regime contradicted the efforts of successive Labor governments for Indigenous reconciliation. Federal Labor had instigated the process of official Reconciliation that accepted the equality and equity of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders through recognition and commitment to uphold their unique rights (Reconciliation Australia 2016; Short 2003a, 2003b). As compared to minority immigrants in settler-colonial nations, Indigenous people never willingly ceded their lands or political autonomy (Short 2007). This made both returning land and granting rights towards sovereignty necessary reparations for historic dispossessions and freedom from present colonial realities (Gilbert 1994).

Institutionalisation of land rights through native title can be understood as what Turner and Rojeck (2001, p. 127) describe as ‘the frequent tension between national systems of rights and international human rights’. The United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP) emphasises free, prior and informed consent; it makes land central to Indigenous culture through articles 3 and 31 (see Daes 1999); and defines self-determination as a remedial political right of distinct peoples and nations with a history of dispossession through article 26¹¹². Owing to the NTA’s limitations, many Indigenous groups turn to the UNDRIP as an accurate articulation of self-determination and lands rights (Short 2007).

Literature on Indigenous agreements by the mining sector (see for example Doenau 1999; Kauffman 1998; O’Faircheallaigh 1995) suggests that its anti-NTA campaign ran simultaneous to its negotiations with Indigenous groups¹¹³.

Although not in principle opposed to native title, the mining industry regarded the

¹¹² UNDRIP was adopted by the UN General Assembly in 2007. The first draft declaration of Indigenous Rights was approved in 1994 by the UN Sub-Commission on the Prevention of Discrimination and Protection of Minorities. Along with the other Anglophone settler colonial nations – the United States, Canada and New Zealand – Australia first voted against the UNDRIP in, arguing that matters of Indigenous self-determination and rights over national resources fell within domestic jurisdiction. Australia finally signed the UNDRIP in 2010 (Ford 2012).

¹¹³ Although empirical evidence pointed to a marginal impact, miners made extravagant and persistent claims about significant impacts (Lavelle 2010).

Native Title Act as a risk; its political posturing rather than ideological opposition over native title was consistent with its responses to other government policies regarded as detrimental to its interests and within its sphere of influence (Lavelle 2010).

Prime Minister John Howard's 'Ten Point Plan' outlined amendments to the NTA to rectify a seeming imbalance created by the privileging of minority interests by earlier governments that risked obstructing the free functioning of market forces (Howard-Wagner 2008). In 1996, the Australian High Court's landmark 'Wik decision' on native title ruled that the granting of pastoral leases did not extinguish Indigenous people's native title rights over land and did not confer exclusive possession on pastoralists¹¹⁴. Following this decision, Howard commented that the 'the pendulum had swung too far in favour of Aboriginal people' through the 'potential right to veto over 78% of the landmass of Australia' (Howard 1997a,b). Howard's neoconservative and neoliberal approach deepened the conflict between Australia's original intention of Indigenous reconciliation and the pre-eminence of mining in the economy.

While the state loomed large in the lives of Aboriginal people (Altman 2009a), the influence of mining loomed large for the Australian state. This power dynamic determined the extent of rights enabled under the combined state and federal land rights regimes instituted in Australia between the mid-1970s and the mid-1990s. The neoliberalisation process set in motion in the last part of this period paved the way for extensive deregulation under Prime Minister Howard. The state significantly withdrew from environmental governance and demonstrated what

¹¹⁴ The High Court's Wik 'native title' decision in December 1996 related to the question of whether granting pastoral leases extinguished native title rights (ATSIC 1997, 1-6). After unsuccessful claims in the Federal Court on account that pastoral leasehold extinguished native title rights on lands under Queensland laws, the Wik and Thayorre People from Cape York Peninsula received a favourable ruling from the Australian High Court that decided inter alia that pastoral leases did not confer exclusive possession on the pastoralist. The ruling however noted that in the event of a conflict between pastoral and native title-holders, the former's rights were upheld under the NTA. The scare campaign against the Wik decision by the mining and pastoral sectors argued that native title gave precedence to minority rights over Australia's long-term economic interests (Howard Wagner 2008). A particularly hostile media campaign by the National Farmers Federation claimed that Aboriginal population could lay claim to anyone's backyard (Kuhn 1998). In response, the *Native Title Amendment Act 1998* (NTAA) tightened the registration process for native title claimants contained in the original act (Lavelle 2010).

Altman calls a conflicted approach towards a growing Indigenous estate, by ascribing the values of tradition and conservation to it while encouraging mining on it (Altman 2012a).

6.3. Resource boom and contradictions of the Australian state

Australia's economic prosperity is historically linked with export-oriented mining. Fostering the competitiveness of its mineral resources has been a longstanding economic policy of the state (Rosewarne 2016). It is the world's largest exporter of black coal, iron ore, lead, zinc and aluminium, and the second largest exporter of uranium (Minerals Council of Australia 2010). Although mining is undertaken in all six states and the Northern Territory, Western Australia and Queensland dominate the sector generating three quarters of Australia's resources (Topp et al. 2008).

Australia's resource relationship began prior to federation, with the gold rush that began in the 1850s (Hajkowicz et al. 2011). The 1930's economic recession and World Wars slowed Australia's resource growth, with mining and energy representing only 1% of the GDP and 5% of exports by 1960 (Maxwell 2006). Subsequent expansions were enabled from the mid-1960s owing to increased global economic activity and the rise of Asian markets, with Australia's political stability proving an advantage for overseas mining corporations (Mckay et al. 2000). By the 1990s a broadly defined category of mining-products contributed 10% of Australia's national economic output (Maxwell 2006).

From the 1990s, China's rise as the global manufacturing workshop generated resource needs on a scale previously inconceivable. This phenomenon has led to an unprecedented increase in Australia's resource extraction and exports since the mid-1990s, with far reaching environmental, social and economic impacts on other sectors.

6.3.1. Economic contradictions and social-ecological effects

The resource boom affected the balance between minerals and fuel mining and the other sectors of the Australian economy¹¹⁵. Being tied to the resources super-cycle connected to the industrialisation of the BRIC economies (Brazil, Russia, India and China), the price of Australian minerals more than tripled between 2002 and 2012 (Tulip 2014). Infact mining was regarded as key to Australia having avoided the recession in 2008 (Perlich 2013). However a major socio-economic effect of mining's unprecedented growth as a result of high minerals prices has been a consequent decline in Australian manufacturing¹¹⁶ (Mitchell and Bill 2006).

Massive capital influx into mining made new technologies¹¹⁷, increased mechanisation, and increased sizes of mining projects possible, drawing rural and remote regions into the global commodity chain (Bridge 2008; Everingham 2016). Supersized projects integrated multiple mining operations and associated port, rail and pipeline infrastructures. The scale of projects transformed landscapes but did not lead to a proportionate increase in employment¹¹⁸. They risked exposing rural communities and environments to cumulative impacts and ill-defined risks from new innovations¹¹⁹ (Bell and York 2010; Cottle and Keys 2014; Franks, Brererton and Moran 2010; Everingham 2016).

By 2012, Australia's 373 active mine complexes were all being expanded in size, alongside new projects and entire greenfield sites being developed for extraction (Cleary 2012). Encroachment of mining on agricultural regions generated a clash

¹¹⁵ The complementarity between mining and prosperity in the Australian economy used to be a function of primary commodities (of mining and agriculture) running a surplus that in turn funded deficits in the manufacturing trade (Goodman and Worth 2008).

¹¹⁶ Mining's unprecedented growth from the mid-1990s delivered a shock to the economy by appreciating the Australian dollar and consequently and destabilised other trade-exposed industries including manufacturing. RBA modelling indicated that manufacturing output in 2013 was 5 % below what would have been achieved without a minerals boom (Tulip 2014).

¹¹⁷ New technologies included hydraulic fracturing and horizontal drilling used for coal seam gas extraction.

¹¹⁸ The mining sector has one of the lowest employment rates of 1.9 % compared to manufacturing which employs five times more (ibid) to the GDP respectively. Employment in mining grew rapidly but from a very small original base, with the effect that its net contribution to job-increases in the Australian economy stood at a mere 7% between 2005 and 2011 (Dennis and Richardson 2011).

¹¹⁹ Rapid mining expansions also meant that the new technologies were deployed before their environmental impacts became fully known (Bridge 2008).

of values, land uses, water needs and skilled labour (Everingham 2016). In *Minefield* journalist Paul Cleary describes the scale of the geographic transformation:

The Australian investment pipeline is claimed to be the world's largest... Massive mining and energy projects are being rolled out with military precision and concentrated in three states. With 41 such projects, Western Australia is regarded as the powerhouse resource state, but Queensland and New South Wales are not far behind, with 29 and 18 projects respectively. In Western Australia, most of the projects are being built in remote areas like the Pilbara; in Queensland and New South Wales, this investment intersects with prime farmland (Cleary 2012, p. 6).

Minerals and energy constituted half the value of exports by 2010-2011¹²⁰, with the mining sector becoming the fourth largest contributor to Australia's GDP at 8% (Australian Bureau of Statistics 2012). Australia became one of only three industrialised economies with significantly high proportions of mining exports (Steven and Dietsche 2008). Although mining's share of the Australian GDP had recorded a peak of 15% during the 1861 gold rush, it had only grown to 6% between 1966 and 1975 (Cook and Porter 1984), indicating the minerals boom's historical scale. The majority of increased investments were in coal, oil and gas, energy sources responsible for major greenhouse emissions (Goodman and Worth 2008).

The scale and nature of the resources boom reopened an old debate on mining's costs and benefits (Carrington and Pereira 2011; Cleary 2011, 2012; Haslam and McKenzie 2011; Lawrie, Tonts and Plummer 2011; Mayes 2008; Nicol 2006), particularly around their uneven distribution. Mining effectively created what is called a two-speed economy (Mitchell and Bill 2006) and ingrained inequalities and social divisions across states and regions owing to spatially concentrated employment (Goodman and Worth 2008). Aspects such as benefits accrued by

¹²⁰ While minerals and fuels accounted for 27% of Australian exports during the 1968 resource boom, that figure rose to 39% by 2002 and to 43% by 2007 (Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade 2007 and Australian Bureau of Statistics 2007b).

cities where the majority of jobs and profits flow versus social and ecological costs incurred by rural communities including direct displacement due to mining, created winners and losers from the resource boom (Everingham 2016).

The boom's impact on Indigenous communities remains highly contested. On the one hand, intra-Indigenous divisions over securing mining rights with repercussions for community capacity have emerged as key areas of social contention during the boom (Doyle 2002). On the other, economic participation through employment and royalty payments allowed some Indigenous communities an opportunity to escape the 'drudgery of the welfare economy' (Langton 2012) and achieve a measure of prosperity (Pearson 2000).

The role of the Australian state during the resource boom can be seen in the context of a neoliberalising political economy that increasingly facilitates internationalised production (Harvey 2011). From the mid-1980s under Labor's Hawke and Keating governments, and under Liberal-National Coalition Prime Minister John Howard from the mid-1990s, the state was consistently weakened by the culture of free markets and globalisation (Doyle 2010). Mining's high foreign ownership¹²¹, export focus, large inflow and outflow of capital¹²², and reliance on imported equipment, rendered Australia a client state whose 'main function was to shape the future development of the economy such that profits of foreign corporations had first priority, and needs of people the last priority' (Crough et al. 1983, p. 35). An ownership structure concentrated amongst a small number of transnationalised corporations created the effect of an oligarchy¹²³ with implications for democracy (Goodman and Worth 2008).

¹²¹ A 2016 Treasury paper estimated that 86 % of investments in major projects are foreign-owned and that only 10% are solely Australian-owned (Australian Treasury 2016). This includes a 26% ownership from the US and 27% from the UK (Australian Treasury 2016).

¹²² A high foreign ownership structure also meant that high GDP growth from mining-exports did not translate into a proportional wealth distribution across households owing to over 80% of 'windfall gains' from high commodity prices going offshore (Dennis and Richardson 2011).

¹²³ Foreign interests also dominate Australia's peak mining lobby groups and the 86 % foreign-owned Australian mining sector has spent \$541 million between 2007 and 2017 lobbying Australian governments (Aulby 2017).

Deeply entrenched mining interests in politics had an impact on Australia's attempts at addressing climate change (Baer 2016). The economic, social, political and ecological changes ushered in by the mining boom have been said to demonstrate effects of the resource curse (Goodman and Worth 2008). They have led to debates around the contradictions of the Australian state in actively enabling the mining sector while disenfranchising communities, disadvantaging other sectors, impacting ecosystems and failing to act on climate change.

6.3.2. Political contradictions and facilitating the boom

The resource curse thesis emerged in the aftermath of the 1960s global economic boom and has primarily focussed on the experiences of resource-rich developing countries (Oskarsson and Ottosen 2010) where resource extraction and exports produced underdevelopment in the long term. The phenomenon is also acknowledged to afflict industrialised countries where it can be understood through the term Dutch disease, coined by *The Economist* to describe the experience in Netherlands in the 1960s when the country prioritised the export of newly discovered natural gas. The Dutch disease led to a rise in exchange rates that rendered the country's manufacturing exports economically unviable (Auty and Warhurst 1993).

The theory has been supported by empirical evidence of socio-economic, political, ecological and livelihood impacts of nature dependent communities in mineral rich countries (Auty 1990; Gelb 1988; Gylfason et al. 1999; Sachs and Warner 1997, 2001). A disproportionate cost of resource-extraction on certain communities is often cited as the central challenge of the resource curse (Martinez-Alier 2002; McCarthy 2002; Schlosberg 2007). In regards to settler colonial states like Australia, mining is understood to extend 'the long arc of violent extractivist frontiers and resource colonialism that has dispossessed Indigenous people' (Parson and Ray 2016, p. 5) apart from transforming ecology and society.

Goodman and Worth (2008) identify three curses of Australia's resource boom: de-industrialisation and social division from the decline of other industries that cause

macro and micro economic effects, capture of Australian Federal Policy by mining demonstrated through diplomatic and military interventions, and ecological degradation and exhaustion through impacts on environments and people. Other studies such as that by Hajkowicz et al. (2011) have similarly discussed social divisions and displacement, spatial inequalities and damaging boom and bust cycles, ecological mal-development and increasing practices of rentier state and capitalism as evidence of resource curse in Australia.

Resource curse literature largely assumed mineral wealth to be state owned (Luong and Weinthal 2006). Since Australia did not nationalise its resources sector in the 1960s and 1970s like various resource rich states, a key determinant of whether it avoided or was afflicted by the resource curse was how the government taxed mining and used the revenues for public good (Goodman and Worth 2008). Australian Bureau of Statistics data for the periods 2001-02 and 2004-05 revealed that taxation rates for minerals, oil and gas in fact fell as commodity prices and mining profits grew, contributing to windfall tax gains for mining (Australian Bureau of Statistics 2007a). In addition, lack of savings mechanisms for mining rents meant governments spent surplus funds generated from mining rents during record high commodity prices for political gains through tax cuts. This pattern was observable in John Howard's government that stayed in power for eleven years (Goodman and Worth 2008).

Australia's subsidisation of coal, natural gas and mineral resources mining since the mid-1980s demonstrates the power of the mining sector over both major Australian parties (Baer 2016). The federal government gave an estimated A\$4 billion in subsidies and state governments spent A\$17.6 billion over a six-year period to support mining (Dennis 2015a). This effectively reduced reliance on renewable energy sources during the first two decades of the resource boom (Australian Bureau of Statistics 2013a; Christoff 2009), despite Australia's significant renewables potential and even as their uptake increased globally. Lack of accountability on the part of elected representatives emerged as a common concern of the resource curse across economies in the North and South (Mulgan

2003; Uhr 1999). This brings into focus the transformation of the state under the combined effect of increasing globalization and extractivism.

A neoliberalising political economy characterises the complex and variable process through which global pressures reconfigure the national, regional and local (Harvey 2011; Mercer et al. 2014; Peck and Tickell 2002; Springer 2012;). Since political economy involves material realities, neoliberalising political economies effectively consist of 'patterns of...power' (Gill 1995, p. 4) and governance regimes influenced by 'agents of transnational capital' (p. 10). By being inextricably bound up in and actively promoting the process of globalisation, the state's political autonomy and steering capacity stand undermined, and consequently the neoliberalising process becomes a driver of ecological destruction (Eckersley 2004). Instead of a simple withdrawal through deregulation, under the process the state becomes directly responsible for socio-environmental impacts under the process, revealing an inherent contradiction.

Through a combination of neoliberal and neoconservative values, John Howard attacked social and environmental agendas with ideological purity (Doyle 2010). Howard removed community participation in environmental regulation, streamlined approvals through the *Environment Conservation and Biodiversity Protection Act 1999* (EPBC) that handed areas of Commonwealth determination to states, de-funded ENGOs, and removed global issues like climate change from the national agenda. Compromising the project approval process, especially fast-tracking super-sized mining projects with high socio-environmental impacts underscores the state's contradiction under neoliberalisation. Fast-tracking is justified by deeming such projects as crucial for the national interest. Governments attempted to balance socio-environmental impacts with fast-tracking major projects by issuing approvals with a long list of conditions, without certainty that companies can meet them, or capacity on its part to monitor or regulate violations (Cleary 2012).

6.3.3. Capture of federal policy: Resource boom versus climate action

Starting from 2007 Australia entered a turbulent decade of politics that demonstrated the effect of resource curse on federal policy and held national climate action to ransom. The coal and thermal power industries formed the 'Green House Mafia' that dominated climate policy (Pearse 2009, p. 41). The nexus between fossil fuel and politics was strengthened through lobbying, political donations, and the Rupert Murdoch-owned NewsCorp news media that enjoys a broad subscription in Australia (Baer 2016).

In 2007, Kevin Rudd replaced John Howard as Prime Minister in what was considered Australia's first climate election. The Rudd government ratified the Kyoto Protocol that John Howard had refused to sign and attempted to legislate emissions reduction¹²⁴. A multi-million dollar advertisement campaign by the Minerals Council of Australia (MCA) spread misinformation about the loss of jobs and competitiveness for companies from Labor's Carbon Pollution Reduction Scheme (CPRS)¹²⁵. Both the Greens and the Liberal-National Coalition voted against the CPRS in 2009 albeit for opposite reasons¹²⁶. Another multimillion-dollar advertising attack by the resources sector on the Kevin Rudd's proposal for a 40% tax on mining profits is understood to have led to his replacement by Julia Gillard in 2010. Prime Minister Gillard negotiated a reduced tax of 30% that would only apply to iron ore and coal, the two largest export-resources (Manne 2011).

In 2011, Julia Gillard's minority Labor government passed the 'Price on Pollution' scheme that proposed a fixed carbon price for three to five years before moving to a cap-and-trade system. The Coalition opposition under Tony Abbott ran a misleading attack alleging mass job losses, soaring electricity bills and

¹²⁴ The government's Carbon Pollution Reduction Scheme (CPRS) proposed a cap and trade mechanism to reduce Australia's emissions by 5% (of 2000 levels) by 2020.

¹²⁵ Independent analysis showed that mining sector would prosper even under drastic emissions reductions and that employment would in fact grow by 22,800 jobs by 2025.

¹²⁶ The Australian Greens criticised that the 5% target aimed to stabilise atmospheric CO₂ levels at 450 parts per million (ppm) as opposed to the scientifically necessary 350 ppm and risked locking in an average temperature rise of 4°C or more compared to the maximum permissible rise of 2°C. The Liberal and National Parties were opposed to a binding commitment to reduce emissions without other big polluters, particularly major developing economies such as China and India coming on board.

skyrocketing living costs¹²⁷. Within the first 100 days of winning the 2013 elections, Tony Abbott's Liberal-National Coalition government repealed Labor's carbon scheme. Other attacks on the environment during this time included attempts to de-list World Heritage forests, hand over matters of federal decision-making under the EPBC Act to states, and attacks on the tax-deductibility status of environmental charities to affect their funding and disrupt their climate and environmental advocacy (Wilkinson et al. 2020). Attacks on renewable policy included cutting the Renewable Energy Target set by John Howard that had enjoyed bipartisan political support.

Parts of the energy industry changed their position on an emissions trading scheme between 2009 and 2015 in response to a global trend away from fossil fuels. However, Malcolm Turnbull who became Prime Minister in 2015, left Tony Abbott's climate policy unchanged owing to the undue influence of climate doubters in the party and did not introduce an emissions trading scheme despite reassuring businesses (Taylor 2017). Without bi-partisan political support on the climate issue on account of the influence of conservative members within the Coalition, Malcolm Turnbull's signing of the Paris Agreement raised concerns about Australia's ability to comply with its requirements in the future (Stephens 2016). Experts also warned that without a long-term policy to phase out coal, Australia would risk failing its emissions-reduction commitments towards keeping global warming within two degrees centigrade (Taylor 2016).

6.3.4. Environmental risks, resource conflicts and contested developments

The challenges of the resource boom and dialectics with state planning and regulatory processes around mining projects followed different trajectories for environmentalists, Indigenous groups and farmers, the constituents of environmental and land conflicts during the boom. Yet they also converged in

¹²⁷ The Coalition's cost-of-living scare campaign against a carbon price has been criticised as entirely political, one of the 'crudest and most distorted debates' in Australian politics, a complete hoax (Edis 2012).

critical geographies that were threatened and transformed by the scale of resource extraction.

The political conundrum of the Great Barrier Reef

Australia's conundrum between driving the resource boom and purposeful climate action became evident through the state's failure to take science-based actions for the Great Barrier Reef (GBR), the world's largest natural reef system and an extensive World Heritage listed area stretching two thousand three hundred kilometres along the Queensland coastline from the Torres Straits in the North to Fraser Island in the South. The Reef had lost more than half its coral cover since the mid-1980s largely on account of long exposure to chemical runoff from agriculture from the mainland, and the bleaching effects from warming oceans (De'ath et al. 2012). Business as usual global emissions would possibly shrink the Reef to one-tenth its size by 2050, and completely kill it by 2100 (Del Monaco et al. 2017).

Some of Australia's largest coal ports lie adjacent to the Great Barrier Reef along Queensland's central coast. The resource boom raised the prospect of a sixfold increase in port capacity along the Reef; a Greenpeace report estimated that a full-capacity port-expansion in Queensland would see more than 10,000 coal-laden ships a year cross the Great Barrier Reef by 2020, a 480% increase from the 1,722 ships that entered the Reef's World Heritage area in 2011 (Greenpeace 2012a). A UNESCO report warned that the Reef was in danger of losing its heritage status unless Australia acted to protect it, especially from 'threatening new port-developments along the coast' (UNESCO 2012). The UN was specifically responding to the recent development of the Wiggins Island Coal Export Terminal (WICET) in Gladstone Harbour on the Central Coast that had involved significant dredging and caused major environmental problems through the dumping of dredge-spoils on the Great Barrier Reef.

The Queensland and Federal governments' joint report 'Reef 2050 Long-Term Sustainability Plan' (Commonwealth of Australia 2015) in response to the UNESCO World Heritage Centre, was criticised by the Australian Academy of Science for representing business as usual and only addressing short term issues like agricultural run-offs while ignoring long term climate impacts on corals, and of mining and coastal infrastructure developments on the Reef (Philips 2014). Referring to proposed mega-mines in the Galilee Basin, scientists asked the Government to choose between 'coal mines operating in 60 years' time or a 'healthy reef' (Norman et al. 2015). ENGOs similarly argued that it is far too risky to develop huge new coal mines, build the world's largest coal ports, dump unprecedented levels of dredge spoil at sea, and still have aspirations to protect the Great Barrier Reef, maintain its World Heritage status, and secure reef-dependent tourism and fishing' (Hughes 2014).

Successive mass bleaching events in 2016 and 2017 killed half the coral in the Great Barrier Reef (Knaus and Evershed 2017; Slezak 2016). Experts warned that with such events likely to increase, the Plan's central aim would be unachievable and that the Great Barrier Reef risked being listed as a World Heritage site in danger (Slezak 2017a). The state's politics on the sustainable management of the Great Barrier Reef came under further criticism on account of significant federal funding being provided to an unknown entity, the Great Barrier Reef Foundation, ostensibly for 'conservation, even as governments cracked down on ENGOs and activists (Slezak 2019).

Changing relations between state, mining, and Indigenous groups

The actions of Aboriginal peoples towards land and economic justice emerged as key players in Australia's mining economy during the resource boom and transformed the nature of land debates (Norman 2016). Despite legislative and judicial limitations of the concept of native title, the Native Title Act 1993 placed obligations on mining companies to negotiate with Indigenous claimants and

created what Langton (2012) calls an 'era of agreements making'¹²⁸. It shifted mining companies away from 'bareknuckle' racism towards remote Aboriginal communities¹²⁹ during previous booms when mining occurred on traditional lands without negotiations or benefits to Aboriginal people. Over 30 years of multiple land rights regimes contributed to an Indigenous estate covering 20% of Australia and containing some of the most ecologically intact landscapes in the North of the continent (Altman et al. 2007).

In contrast to mining's rhetorical transformation, the Australian state under Prime Minister Howard assumed a paternalistic view towards Indigenous development by de-emphasising land rights and singularly emphasising full-scale economic participation through mining for closing the socio-economic gap between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australia (Altman 2009b). The 1998 NTA amendments indicated that the state approached Indigenous affairs through economic liberalism, emphasising economic freedom rather than civil liberties (Quiggin 2005). The 2006 amendments to the Northern Territory land rights, ALRA, noted that the 'the principal objectives [of amendments] are to improve access to Aboriginal land for development, especially mining' (ALRA amendment bill 2006, p. 30). The state also appeared conflicted in its approach to the development of the growing Indigenous estate with the onset of the resource boom (Altman 2012b).

Altman contests the assumption that benefits from mining will eventually trickle through to remote Indigenous communities with considerable development challenges on two significant grounds. The socioeconomic benefits from mining can only be assessed at the local and case-by-case basis, making it improbable to generalise on this basis (Altman 2009a, 2009b). Further, the presence of a customary market in remote locations demonstrates the failure of free market alone to deliver favourable outcomes for remote communities (Altman et al. 2006; Altman 2007) and signifies the need for a 'hybrid economy model' where the state

¹²⁸ The peak mining industry body Minerals Council of Australia (MCA) estimated over 300 'benefit sharing agreements' between mining companies and Indigenous communities in the first decade of the resource boom (Altman 2009a).

¹²⁹ The shift in the MCA's public narrative from attacking native title legislation to building sustainable Indigenous communities is also palpable during this period (Altman 2009b).

plays a role alongside the market and communities to ensure economic diversity in remote regions (Altman 2005).

Altman (2012b) argues that the government's emphasis on mining for remote Indigenous communities in the resource boom era stood in conflict with its own regime and approach on land rights, which is based on a discourse of tradition, continuity, and connection to country that augments the conservation values of the Indigenous estate. The Australian government had supported the Indigenous conservation initiative through the formation of Indigenous Protected Areas (IPA)¹³⁰ and instituting the Working on Country Program to employ Indigenous rangers, demonstrating a hybrid economic model. However, increasing pressure for Indigenous communities to participate in mining enabled through government policies threatens to destroy these environmental and cultural values and extinguish native title and land rights (Altman 2012b).

Coal seam gas versus agriculture and politics of water

Although mining has historically coexisted with agriculture in Australia, its unprecedented increase during the resource boom led to an encroachment on prime agricultural lands, sparking land and water concerns amongst farmers and directly threatening Australia's second largest export industry. In particular, the drive for coal seam gas¹³¹ (CSG) exposed prime agricultural land in Queensland, New South Wales and Victoria to drilling operations. Resistances in the more populated farming regions of New South Wales and Victoria were able to check the explosion of CSG industry in the early stages of exploration. Queensland however became the epicentre of coal seam gas production, with vast distances between rural towns and smaller populations making the grassroots resistance less effective.

¹³⁰ In 2011 the Australian Government listed 50 IPAs covering 24 % of the Australian Conservation Estate (Australian Government 2011).

¹³¹ Soaring demands from the Asian markets of Japan, China and Korea created opportunities for major Australian oil and gas companies like Santos and Origin to develop coal seam gas wells accompanied by liquefied natural gas (LNG) processing plants and massive export terminals.

By 2011, the Surat Basin in Southern Queensland, a region containing some of the state's most productive farmlands, and the Bowen Basin, Queensland's largest coalmining region, collectively faced the prospect of 40,000 CSG wells being sunk into the landscape. Pipelines 500 kilometres linked the wells to processing plants on Curtis Island on the Central Coast, creating a 'spiderweb effect' across the landscape (Cleary 2012). New export terminals at Gladstone Harbour to transport liquefied gas affected water quality with consequences for the adjoining Great Barrier Reef (Hunt 2011).

Hydraulic fracturing or fracking, the process of coal seam gas extraction involves injecting millions of litres of chemically treated water deep underground to release the gas trapped in the coal seams under pressure. Apart from the destruction and fragmentation of farmland through the digging of wells and associated infrastructure, fracking risks dewatering and contaminating underground aquifers, threatening the water supplies of farmers in the interiors of the continent. Disposal of saline CSG water posed an additional problem, with no impact-free method having been identified.

Concern of farmers, scientists and conservation groups about the impacts of CSG and large coal projects on ground water, and significant resistances in New South Wales and Victoria¹³², forced the federal government to add a water trigger to the EPBC Act in 2012. Under the water trigger, CSG and large coalmining projects with significant water impacts required federal approval, which in turn needed to be informed by recommendations from the Independent Expert Scientific Committee (IESC) on Coal Seam Gas and Large Coal Mining development. The role of the state in the CSG conflict reveals a double movement on its part. On the one hand, states approved CSG projects that deployed new technologies with unknown risks in violation of the precautionary principle through fast tracking and often without its own capacity for monitoring (Cleary 2012). On the other hand, the federal

¹³² The conflict led to the formation of an unusual alliance between farmers and environmentalists coming from opposite ends of the political spectrum, sparking the creation of the farmers-driven grassroots network 'Lock the Gate'.

government was forced to capitulate under widespread protests from the agriculture sector and pass ameliorative legislation.

6.4. Narratives, politics, and alliances of environmentalism during the resource boom

This section looks at three areas pertinent to the transformation of Australian environmentalism during the resource boom: grassroots anti-fossil-fuel resistances and their linkages with global anti-fossil fuel activism, the alliance between environmentalists and farmers against coal and gas, and the alliances of environmentalists with Indigenous communities fighting extraction.

Subsections 6.4.1 to 6.4.4 chronologically outline the thrust of the internal transformation of the environment movement's politics from that of wilderness protection to 'End(ing) Coal'. The shift was generated through mass movement formations at sites of massive coal extraction, and became evident through new narratives, activisms and organisational structures of ENGOs, particularly in the period between the Copenhagen Climate Summit in 2009 and the Paris Climate summit in 2015. The shift was also marked by the emergence of new forms of activisms and models of mobilisations that were inter-linked with global anti-fossil fuel networks.

Subsection 6.4.5 looks at politics, narratives and activisms emerging from its engagement with the newly disaffected community of farmers impacted by coal and coal seam gas mining. Subsections 6.4.6 to 6.4.8 look at three Indigenous land-rights conflicts during the resource boom. These indicate a transformation of the dynamics between state, corporations and Indigenous groups. They also add new political dimensions and narratives to Indigenous-green alliances through deeper relations and articulations of a shared future founded on cultural and historical obligations of Indigenous communities to country.

6.4.1. Grassroots anti-coal activism before Copenhagen

From the 1980s, the integration of the Hunter Valley in New South Wales into the global coal economy brought environmental and health impacts from mining and power generation. But transformations during the minerals boom proved unprecedented. During the first decade of the minerals boom it became Australia's largest coal producing region, losing its previous economic balance between coalmining and wine, tourism, defence and thoroughbreds (Cleary 2012). Grassroots and local resistances that emerged during this time challenged the legitimacy of coalmining in Australia's oldest coal-exporting region and represented the 'shifting grounds of environmental knowledge and oppositional practices' not just by coal-affected residents (Connor et al. 2009, p. 496) but also by the environment movement.

While local groups Minewatch and Singleton Healthy Air raised local environmental concerns, Rising Tide's actions demonstrated a militant participatory democracy in response to climate change where citizens directly stopped economic activity for both local and global sustainability. The global anti-capitalist Rising Tide network first formed in 2000 in the United Kingdom that describes itself as with the purpose of organising for social justice and sustainability (Evans 2010). Rising Tide Newcastle that was established in 2004 reflected a new politics in Australian environmental activism at a time when professionalised ENGOs had not begun intervening against Australia's coal exports:

Fifteen years ago big NGOs working on climate change focused on Howard not ratifying Kyoto. The emphasis was on renewable energy because of small successes that were possible in that area. Targeting 'big polluters' was not yet a strategy. The energy export industry was seen as too powerful to touch. Under Rudd, there was optimism with the policy approach and the movement lacked a political edge, getting involved in technical emissions arguments instead. After Inconvenient Truth increased public awareness and led to a blossoming of local groups, we (big NGOs) trained new local

networks. But overall, there were very few political actions; grassroots actions of Rising Tide were the only early politically focussed actions (Sunrise Project Co-Director (ex-Greenpeace) interview 20/10/2017).

Rising Tide's 2006 campaign against New South Wales's largest proposed coal mine at Anvil Hill was Australia's first direct opposition to coalmining on the basis of climate change and it made Anvil Hill an 'icon of the climate issue' in public awareness (Woods 2007). The network organised annual 'People's Blockades of the World's Biggest Coal Port' consisting of flotillas of hundreds of canoes that halted shipping traffic at the port of Newcastle, and annual 'Climate Camps' of radical activists¹³³ that culminated in peaceful protests involving rail and coal train blockades (Evans 2010). The opposition to the construction of a third coal-export terminal (T3) at Newcastle Harbour in 2008 turned out to be the largest direct action in the climate movement (Rosewarne et al 2014). Protestors blockaded the train line to the port for a whole day and disrupted economic activity to the tune of A\$1.2million US dollars (Talanoa 2008).

However, the failure to stop the development of the mine or port projects revealed the mining sector's power and the legal system's ineffectiveness to protect the public interest:

Anvill Hill basically taught us that environmental laws are ineffective, that projects are never stopped and that the companies are so powerful they can get laws changed anyway. Community campaigns like Rising Tide's opposition to the T3 coal terminal expansion at Newcastle harbour hardly put a dent in the projects and got steamrolled (Sunrise Project Co-Director [ex-Greenpeace] interview 20/10/2017).

¹³³ The Australian Climate Camps started in 2008 with the Newcastle T3 coal terminal action, with the aim of directly disrupting coal production and export. The 2009 Climate Camps in Helensburgh in New South Wales and La Trobe Valley in Victoria targeted the extension of an underground coal mine and the Hazelwood Power Station that the state Government had decided to extend instead of phasing out. They struggled to gain popularity within the broader climate movement in Australia, being considered too radical (Rosewarne et al. 2014).

A landmark decision by the New South Wales Land and Environment Court in the *Anvil Hill Case* (Gray v Minister for Planning 2006) ruled that the government should have included 'indirect emissions' associated with the burning of coal from the mine either in Australia or overseas in the overall environmental assessment, but it could not stop the mine (Connor et al. 2009). Subsequent legal challenges against the mine also proved unsuccessful (Connor et al. 2009; Strachan 2007).

6.4.2. Towards a national anti-coal environmentalism

The fertile lands of the Liverpool Plains to the north west of Hunter Valley became the next big region for the encroachment of coalmining and coal seam gas drilling, directly threatening farmlands and the agriculture exports market.

With the size of mining projects increasing between the first and second decades of the resource boom, the Whitehaven Coal owned Maules Creek coal mine in the Gunnedah Basin that commenced operations by 2014 emerged as New South Wales's largest coal mine. State and federal governments approved the coal mine despite the project's financial unviability owing to a structural decline in coal and risked the project becoming a stranded asset (Greenpeace 2015). A lonely battle by local farmers over several years to save their farmlands was followed by the forging of alliances with environmental groups and the Gomeroi traditional owners against mining at Maules Creek (Evans 2014).

The idea to blockade at Maules Creek grew over years to become a protest gathering of climate and forest campaigners from around Australia who had a 'big picture view of the world' (Greenpeace Campaigner (ex-FLAC) interview 23/10/2017). What began in 2012 as a small protest camp in the Leard Forests, the last remaining ancient woodlands in the region, grew to become the Frontline Action on Coal (FLAC), a community-driven frontline anti-coal protest group (Evans 2014). Big NGOs eventually 'got involved when the movement gathered steam' (Greenpeace Campaigner (ex-FLAC) interview 23/10/2017). The multi-pronged resistance to the coal mine set a precedent for future anti-coal campaigns:

We did not know if we would win, but we wanted to make it a watershed moment for the climate movement, when many people stepped up and held off coal. So the anti-Adani base got built there. We had multiple strategies, such as financial disruption, and diverse public participation, such as with faith groups getting involved. The climate movement got its act together and delayed the mine (Tipping Point Campaigner (ex-350.org) interview 27/10/2017).

Several big ENGOs who represented pragmatist tendencies within Australia's climate and environmental movements had grown disillusioned by the medium range of Kevin Rudd's climate policies (Rosewarne et al. 2014). A split amongst large groups over the Rudd government's second CPRS legislation in 2009¹³⁴ (Pearse 2011) followed by the failure of the 2009 Copenhagen Climate Summit to deliver global commitments on tackling emissions turned several ENGOs towards direct disruption of coalmining:

After a split on the CPRS, the politics got ugly and optimism turned to pessimism. There was a real explosion of actions by coal-affected communities between 2010 and 2012. In new areas where coal was expanding, they had not seen the dynamics of governments before. First they were shocked they (governments) can act against all scientific evidence. In a way it was necessary to break the faith of people in government and planning, in order to build movement (Greenpeace Campaigner (ex-FLAC) interview 23/10/2017).

By 2012, a multi-pronged strategy of anti-coal activism consisting of on-ground protests, economic disruptions through financial targeting of investors and shareholders, diverse civil society participation, and the involvement of large groups, began to emerge out of nearly a decade of localised anti-coal and gas protests. By this time, Australia was poised for an even further unprecedented

¹³⁴ The Australian Conservation Foundation (ACF), World Wildlife Fund (WWF) and the Climate Institute backed the CPRS in return for Labor adopting a conditional 25% emissions-reduction target for 2020. The Greens, Greenpeace, Friends of the Earth (FOE), the Wilderness Society, Australian Youth Climate Coalition (AYCC) and GetUp! opposed the bill on account of the conditions lending uncertainty to whether a 25% target could be achieved (Pearse 2011).

scale of fossil-fuel expansion on account of record high resource prices for a decade and a half (Greenpeace 2012b), forcing a complete shift in the movement's outlook:

Oil terminals on Curtis Island and Gladstone harbour got approved and there was no opposition. Everyone said the industry was so big, so powerful, how can we even begin to challenge it? Our imagination was colonised! But Gladstone was turning point...I got a call from Drew Hutton, 'There is a massive gas hub coming up can you help? That was the beginning of LTG (Lock the Gate) ... And in 2011 a philanthropist asked 'what is happening with export coal, Australia's biggest problem'? Targeting coal finally became a national strategy in 2012 (Sunrise Project Co-Director (ex-Greenpeace) interview 20/10/2017).

6.4.3. 'Save the Reef': success and concerns of proxy anti-coal environmentalism

A 2012 Greenpeace report *Boom Goes the Reef* estimated a six-fold increase in coal traffic across the Great Barrier Reef World Heritage Area from six proposed coal port expansions along Queensland's central coast (Greenpeace 2012a). The visual scale of the expansion of Queensland's coal exports has been described as 'a sea of ships waiting to get out and not enough ports' (Australian Marine Conservation Society (AMCS) Campaign Director interview 15/10/2017). The sea of ships started collecting after the expansion of the Bowen Basin in Central Queensland making it Australia's largest black coal producing region by 2010 (Maddison 2011). The proposals included ambitious expansions at Abbott Point near Bowen – comprising four new terminals with an additional handling capacity of 120 million tonnes¹³⁵ – to service proposed coal mines from the Greenfield Galilee Basin in Central Queensland. It would make Abbott Point the world's biggest coal port and would come at an environmental cost of five million tonnes of dredged sediment from the seabed adjoining the Great Barrier Reef (Greenpeace 2012a).

¹³⁵ In 2011 Abbott Point had two berths and a coal handling capacity of 50 million tonnes per annum.

Proposals for this six-fold increase in Queensland's coal ports came around the same time that the UN expressed concerns about the Reef's deterioration and over Queensland allowing a Liquefied Natural Gas Plant to be built within the Reef's designated World Heritage Area (Hoegh-Guldberg 2012). In Queensland, a very high dependency on the international resources market and the historic power of the mining industry over the state resulted in weak environmental governance that continued and was further compromised during the resource boom:

The narrative was that Queensland has to catch up with the rest of Australia. A whole political class was created on the exploitation of nature, and foreign capital and cheap tools went together to serve the purpose. Bowen had open-cut coal mines, Cape York had Bauxite mines. That was the Queensland model of development; a quarry! When the GFC shrunk the economy to half after 2008, the government got desperate and largely suspended all environmental planning and regulation. It became about development at any cost. Gas processing at Curtis Island went ahead even before verifying if there was adequate CSG resource (The Wilderness Society Campaign Director interview 15/10/2017).

Extending anti-coal activism that were shaped over a decade of environmental conflicts in the Hunter Valley and Liverpool Plains in New South Wales to Queensland required two approaches. The national environment movement worked to improve the capacity of local, regional and state-based environmental groups and activist networks in Queensland through campaign resources and national and international funding (ex-Coordinator Mackay Conservation Group (MCG) interview 28/10/2017). The movement also chose an indirect political approach to tackle the coal-expansion issue in Queensland through the Great Barrier Reef as a strategic measure on account of the state's weaker democratic structures and the need to exert external public pressure, as compared to New South Wales:

We could see around 100 mines, 9 ports and rail expansions across both states. In New South Wales the key issue was the expansion on agriculture. We launched the land water future campaign there. New South Wales has a diverse economy, and two houses of Parliament. The Greens are an institutional power in Upper House; there would be a much better chance of outcomes from this campaign in New South Wales than Queensland. In Queensland we focussed on the Reef as a strategic focus for coal exports from Queensland, that has a wider, a national and international appeal (Sunrise Project Co-Director (ex-Greenpeace) interview 20/10/2017).

During the peak of Queensland's coal boom in 2012 national and regional ENGOs organised themselves into the 'Fight for our Reef' movement aimed at stopping Queensland's coal expansions by targeting new port developments along the Great Barrier Reef:

We were talking about possibly millions of cubic metres of dredge spoils being dumped on the Reef! There were fish kills from water pollution from the LNG terminal on Curtis Island; no one could fish. A major donor who was worried about the dredging funded a significant joint campaign. Our campaign aligned with the World Heritage Committee notice in 2012. The WHC came over in 2013; IUCN also came to examine the Reef. AMCS ran the public campaign and WWF did the inside lobbying-work. Our logic was that if we stopped port-expansions we stopped coal-exports anyway. We pushed for the Reef to be on the endangered list (of World Heritage sites) (AMCS Campaign Director interview 15/10/2017).

As the only national ENGO with a prominent presence in Queensland, with staff and volunteers at multiple locations including Mackay, Cairns, Whitsundays and Brisbane, the Australian Marine Conservation Society was key to the running of the anti-coal campaign on the ground (Sunrise Project Co-Director (ex-Greenpeace) interview 20/10/2017). Government proposals for dredging and dredge spoils dumping operations within the GBR's World Heritage Area were one of the 'Fight

for the Reef's' strongest contentions and the subject of several legal challenges¹³⁶. Constituency based mobilisations against the ideological environmental attacks by the state and federal Liberal governments proved effective in increasing the reach of the movement:

It was easier to generate outrage against the Abbott and Newman governments. People got motivated to agitate at the thought of dredge spoils being dumped in the World Heritage Area! Along the coast, community groups like the Whitsundays Residents against dumping (WRAD) cropped up. Thousands joined in from around Australia, I think it became Australia's biggest conservation campaign at one point! Reef Tourism operators were worried. Some are wary to talk about Reef damage; they don't want to drive tourists away, specially in Townsville and Cairns where they are more commercial. But outrage at what happened at Gladstone helped to galvanise the sector. They did their lobbying and threatened to take Greg Hunt to court, after which the Minister pivoted away from dumping on the Reef. We succeeded in making investors pull out from port investments (AMCS Coordinator Airlie Beach interview 30/10/2017).

The campaign combined the multi-pronged approach of earlier anti-coal activisms in New South Wales, in which legal challenges and divestment activism played crucial roles alongside community mobilisations. GetUp ran an international online

¹³⁶ The initial proposal for disposal of dredge spoils from port expansion proposed dumping in the Great Barrier Reef Marine National Park. It was strongly opposed by environmental groups and marine scientists. The second proposal to dump dredge spoils in the coastal Caley Valley wetlands that provide sanctuary to populations of over 40,000 waterbirds in the wet season and serve as a turtle nesting sites was also opposed. Concerted mobilisations coupled with litigation against dumping dredge spoils in the World Heritage area by civil society groups, concerns of marine scientists, and the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority (GBRMPA)'s advice to the Federal environment minister not to approve dredging at the coal terminal thwarted initial attempts at planned expansion of the Abbott Point Coal Terminal. The final proposal, approved by the Federal Environment Minister in December 2015, was a marked improvement, proposing dumping dredge spoils on land immediately adjacent to the existing port. It proposed only one new coal terminal and an increase in the port's coal handling capacity to 120 million tonnes per annum (mtpa) that would require the dredging of 1.1 million cubic metres of seafloor material. As against the previous taxpayer funded expansion proposals, mine proponents would pay for the expansion as per the final proposal. A community group also challenged the federal approval of the third proposal in court.

campaign that could ‘mobilise and fundraise even in Europe’ targeting Deutsche Bank’s investment in the massive proposed expansions of the Abbott Point coal port on the central coast (GetUp Queensland Coordinator interview 14/06/2018). The German investor eventually pulled out of the Abbott point expansion project in 2014 (Jewel 2014).

Regional and local groups brought four legal cases against coal port expansions and the state and federal government proposals to dump dredge spoils in the World Heritage Area of the Great Barrier Reef (see Environmental Law Australia 2016). The local group Whitsunday Residents against Dumping went into voluntary liquidation in 2016 after losing its legal challenge against the expansion of the Abbott Point coal port, but was reformed as ‘Reef Action Whitsundays’, demonstrating a continuance of grassroots resistances. Activist groups organising blockade camps in New South Wales started mobilising non-violent disruptive actions at strategic sites along Queensland’s central coast:

In 2015 the Reef Defenders who were basically people from Front Line Action on Coal organised a ‘Listen Up’ with Uncle Dodd, a Birri man, and his family, on their country near Bowen, near Abbott Point. 200 to 300 people attended from all over. It was three days of training and planning. We did a symbolic blockade. We handed a pledge at Abbot Point saying we will continue fighting peacefully (Tipping Point Campaigner (ex-350 Australia) interview 27/10/2017).

‘Fight for the Reef’ reached a significant milestone in 2015 when Queensland abandoned proposals to dump dredge spoils in the Great Barrier Reef World Heritage Area. Significant investment withdrawals from coal-port expansions owing both to activist pressure and turn in the global outlook for coal drastically shrunk the government’s ambition for coal-port expansions:

By 2014 most port-developments had stopped, only extensions would go ahead. They changed the dredge spoil dumping site to the Calley Valley wetlands, but pressure continued, and even that idea was abandoned. The

WHC met in July 2015, the Reef was on the brink of being put on the endangered list. The Federal government saved the day with the Reef 2050 plan. It had 150 actions; one was to restrict port-developments, basically, no new Greenfield ports. The Queensland state Port Authority (QSPA) restricted port development; it included criterion for what kind of port-development can occur. Adani's coal mine scaled down, so Abbott Point didn't need a new terminal. There was no immediate threat of dredging, so we had kind of won! We did not have a message anymore (AMCS Campaign Director interview 15/10/2017).

This movement milestone was however confronted with the reality of back to back and extensive bleaching events of the Great Barrier Reef in 2016 and 2017, forcing a need to move towards a more direct narrative of saying no to coal in the next wave of the anti-coal movement's focus in Queensland:

We saw intense coral bleaching in 2016 and 2017. 30% of all shallow-water corals died, within a depth of 5 to 10 meters. 2016 was worse in Port Douglas, and 2017 between Cairns and Townsville. 1500 kilometres severely bleached across two events. We had continuous engagement with the World Heritage Committee during the bleaching events; the WHC has 3 main emissions pathways and scenarios for the Reef's future – high, medium and low. There was despair about the Reef, but no direct action after the threat of dredging was put aside. What would be our new message? We are at a point where coal is seen as toxic...So it used to be Fight for the Reef Campaign and then it became Stop Adani (AMCS Campaign Director interview 15/10/2017).

Activists within the movement have also expressed concerns about the ineffectiveness of the 'Fight for the Reef' narrative to tackle Queensland's coal-export problem. One of the two primary concerns involves the movement's centralised model and message:

We are exporting more coal now than we ever have. We are not saying that upfront. National groups need national issues, so they picked the Reef issue, while the little community groups are not being heard; there's a form of colonisation going on. Sunrise tries to break down the centralised model and have people and funding for very local mining issues, but still, they are finally governed by funding interests (ex-Coordinator Mackay Conservation Group interview 28/10/2017)

Another concern with the national campaign is around the movement failing to create change from the ground-up in Queensland:

Reef crying for a helpline is a mickey-mouse frame. Real tension is between local messages and national messages. The strategy for the Franklin campaign was not driven out of Tasmania. The solutions for coal are not being driven out of Queensland. The movement carries the DNA of the US movements! It is hyper partisan (The Wilderness Society Campaign Director interview 15/10/2017).

Another related tension within the environment movement arose between outlooks of activists that prioritised a region's just transition from coal versus those who responded to the urgency to stop Australia's coal exports, particularly between those groups and activists strongly invested in local communities and regions versus those driving the movement's national objectives of stopping coal (Greenpeace Campaigner (ex FLAC) interview 23/10/2017).

6.4.4. A new environmentalism of 'End(ing) Coal!'

The anti-coal resistances in New South Wales had honed global environmental activism's new dual approach: that of targeting and getting financial institutions to divest from fossil-fuel projects and build a grass roots resistance at the local level (Sunrise Project Strategist interview 18/06/2018). Divestment, community mobilisations and mass civil disobedience actions had been used in resistances

against massive fossil-fuel projects in North America, such as the Keystone XL Pipeline and Tar sands, and Dakota Access Pipeline:

The Tar sands protests set a big example for us. Bill Mckibben called out to people to come and get arrested and they all came. 1500 people got arrested (350 Australia CEO interview 10/10/2017).

350 Australia ran a 'Divest from Fossil Fuels' campaign between 2012 and 2015 in the lead up to the Paris Climate Summit:

It started as a moral issue, 'will you stop supporting big polluters' and divest from the fossil fuel industry?' but it grew into one of the most effective forms of campaigning by making it about the money. Even someone like the Financial Review acknowledged it the most effective green campaign. We targeted Super Funds, Universities, the 'big four' Australian banks - Commonwealth, National Australia Bank, Australia New Zealand Bank and Westpac - and got support from several communities, faith-based and religious groups, and churches. Thirty-five of Australian's biggest councils pledged to divest. (350 Australia CEO interview 10/10/2017).

The old conservation NGOs were most affected by this transformation; they were 'revitalised' through a big shift in their staffing and organisational structures to include a newer generation of activists focussed on building community power, and collaborating with the wider movement, rather than their older approach of policy expertise and lobbying in Parliament (Sunrise Project Co-Director (ex-Greenpeace) interview 20/10/2017). The transformation led to the emergence of new organisations that had a different organisational scale and set up compared to older ENGOs, approached community organising differently, and often performed niche or specialised functions within the folds of the new movement approach.

The small divestment-activism focussed organisation Market Forces targeted shareholders and investors of fossil-fuel projects (www.marketforces.org.au). The

Sunrise Project was formed after the Australian environment movement formed its national anti-coal strategy and focussed on coordinating grassroots resistances to coal around Australia through providing funding, resource and strategy-based support, helping groups to 'basically find their niche' (Sunrise Project Co-Director (ex-Greenpeace) interview 20/10/2017).

The political activism group GetUp started in 2005 with a model of online mobilisation driven through email lists and databases for online activism:

We worked on only one thing at one time for maximum impact. We have fundraised for legal actions and to support small groups. We aimed to build electoral power; so marginal electorates were a focus and we work to build up a member-base there. We also know what the high-density GetUp member areas are, from where we can make the most impact. Members use our calling technology to call MPs. It can be easily done from home. Our strength is a large membership and good audio and video technology; that's how members take action. We share this with other groups. We are tech-dependent so not very de-centralised. It is hard to do organising from the city-centre to regional areas, so there we provide strategic tech-support (GetUp Queensland Coordinator interview 14/06/2018).

Several activists I interviewed had moved across multiple new organisations within a short span of time, indicating a strong current of dynamism in the environment movement in the period after the Copenhagen Summit. It also indicated the availability of considerable seed funding and major donor grants for environment movement's new objective of transitioning Australia away from coal-exports. It indicated a rapid evolution in anti-coal activist approaches, models of community organising and mobilisation, and consequently a dynamic process of the formation of multiple organisations that were targeted and agile to respond to the dynamic needs of the movement.

These transformations of the environment movement occurred within the atmosphere of consistent attacks on the environment movement by state and

federal governments. One of the primary attacks constituted the withdrawal of government funding from the Environment Defenders Offices (EDO). They demonstrated resilience and flexibility in being able to transition to new business models that included public donations and providing pro-bono legal services in various legal challenges brought by communities and local groups (Solicitor Queensland Environment Defenders Office interview 25/09/2017).

The federal government's attack on the charitable status under the Australian Charities Act that allows financial supporters of registered charities to make tax deductible donations affected all large environmental groups at state and national level. ENGOs have been susceptible to attacks by Coalition government's that have tried to undermine their activism through draconian measures such as the requirement to spend a quarter of their budgets on environmental remediation (Walker 2017).

Smaller and newer activist groups with alternative funding options were able to operate with greater freedom, bringing more interdependence and complementarity within the environment movement, which brought both a shift in culture and practice (Sunrise Project Strategist interview 18/06/2018). The online-activist group GetUp is a case in point: 'Since we do not have a DGR status we can tell people how to vote during elections' (GetUp Queensland Coordinator interview 14/06/2018). The acronym DGR stands for deductible gift recipient and the term DGR status refers to the charitable status of not for profit organisations under the Australian Charities Act discussed in the previous paragraph.

Over 10 years, while Australia's political pendulum on climate action swung from the left to right, the environment movement moved the debate on coalmining, and the condition of the Great Barrier Reef to a point where these two came to be intricately linked in people's minds as the cause and effect of climate change. These skirmishes between political and coal interests on the one side, and a rapidly organising environment movement against coal on the other, constituted the backdrop within which the Carmichael project travelled through the various hoops of government approvals from 2012. The build-up of a national anti-coal

environmental movement also set the ground for the resistance to Adani's Carmichael mine.

6.4.5. Lock the Gate! Farmer-environmentalist alliance against mining

Encroachment of mining on productive farmlands during the resource boom reshaped regional economies and redefined the cumulative impacts on rural communities (Everingham 2016). From the perspective of social movement theory, suddenly imposed grievances (Walsh and Warland 1983) or NIMBY-style shock imposed through mining activities on fertile farmlands (McAdam 2017) catalysed the mobilisation of farming communities against coal and gas, primarily in Queensland, New South Wales and Victoria.

Farmers collaborated with environmental activists 'out of desperation' at the government disregarding their social, ecological and economic concerns while promoting mining interests (Hutton 2013). Lock the Gate first formed as an organisation to help farming communities to mobilise against fracking and coalmining during the peak of Queensland's coal-seam gas boom (Hutton 2013). While it could not arrest Queensland's CSG boom, between 2008 and 2010 Lock the Gate succeeded in building an effective organising network in parts of regional New South Wales and Victoria that were anticipating coal and gas projects:

We recognised that the horse has bolted in Queensland. There the environmental governance is weak, and it has a unicameral system. But there was a good opportunity in New South Wales, in Victoria. There is a history of 50 to 60 years of movements in northern New South Wales where the gas fields are. Land tenure is different across Queensland and New South Wales. Queensland has a lot of open country and few towns. New South Wales has fertile land and more towns and farmlands dotted across a smaller landscape. In 2009 we started working earnestly with regional communities in Victoria, it was very early and very opportune here (Friends of the Earth Campaign (FOE) Coordinator interview 20/11/2017).

From the perspective of environmentalists, the collaborations were born out of environmentalism's strategic shift after Copenhagen and evolved to generate successful new models for grassroots resistance:

Since 2009 our energy focussed on 'new constituencies'. We met people where they were and took it from there. The rest is history. The approach was not NIMBYism, but bioregionalism: what do people want for their region? The 'Gas-field free Organising Model' emerged out of this exercise. First, we define the boundary of the community, then we door-knock and collect data, then develop the narrative, then we make a gas-field free declaration. Bit by bit we block off the land, watershed by watershed. This model flowed on to New South Wales, Victoria, South Australia, Tasmania and Western Australia, all places except Queensland! (FOE Campaign Coordinator interview 20/11/2017).

Lock the Gate (LTG) did not reflect the values of environmentalists and unlike ENGOs did not assume a directly anti-corporate stance (Hutton 2012, p. 15). LTG coordinators saw no value in taking environmentalism's cultural values upfront into farming communities, focussing instead on finding common purpose in resistance and making models of solidarity scalable across places while bearing in mind critical differences:

Lock the Gate's Gas Free Farmlands model worked in rural and small regional towns with less than 2000 people. It needed hundred % engagement. But in bigger communities with more than 8000 we came up with a different model – streets declared themselves gas free – so that became a stone in the pond. Building power in the grassroots is our idea as opposed to directed network that activists talk about. It was a political philosophy predicated on solidarity – what happened if we lock up industry here? (FOE Campaign Coordinator interview 20/11/2017)

The alliance refrained from putting climate change at the centre of their actions as a reflection of its diverse support base and a compromise between the need to stop

mining on farming land and historically different values and orientations of farmers and environmentalists:

In grassroots many do not even think about climate change, over time maybe. Water and land are the main issues. They see climate change as a problem that environmentalists will fix (Greenpeace Campaigner (ex FLAC) interview 23/10/2017)

Like other anti-fossil fuel resistances during the resource boom, the tactics of Lock the Gate combined grassroots mobilising along with political advocacy and divestment activism. Describing the Victorian league of Lock the Gate, the Friends of the Earth Coordinator said:

We also did inside track work with Canberra lobbying and Spring street lobbying, for grassroots networks it gives a sense of agency to people. They cannot think only region – has to be state and also national. So groups like Market Forces were critical to our economic activism part. Rhizomatic organising is how we see the VIC organising worked, and grass roots fibrous network that collects all this information (FOE Coordinator interview 20/11/2017).

Farmer-environmentalist collaborations enabled through Lock the Gate and its new models of anti-mining resistance built a larger and distinct grassroots movement from urban mobilisations involving formalised ENGOs and climate groups:

Three separate movements - Beyond Coal and Gas Movement, the Climate Action Movement and the Climate Justice Movement. In a way they separated the grassroots from the big NGOs. There was very little movement between the Beyond Coal and Gas movement and Climate movement. Before the Beyond Coal and Gas movement there was Lock the Gate. It is LTG's work that built BCandG up! (Greenpeace Campaigner (ex FLAC) interview 23/10/2017).

Although the resistances raised possibilities of recasting the political field through society's reoccupation of and a consequent democratisation of politics, Arashiro (2017) warns against idealising these struggles due to the striking presence of neoliberal logics in community discourses in Australia. Unlike in a developing world context where structural inequality and social justice are fundamental to environmental debates and mining conflicts, concerns with public accountability and protection of private goods might not translate into a resistance against capitalism in the Australian case.

6.4.6. Green-Black anti-coal alliances on the Liverpool Plains

I now discuss three cases of Indigenous-environmental alliances formed in opposition to mining projects during the resource boom that have added new dimensions to historic Green-Black relations in Australia. The first, discussed below, continues the discussion on anti-coal activism on the Liverpool Plains. The other two, an anti-uranium mining campaign and an anti-gas campaign, discussed in the next two subsections, although unrelated to coal-extraction, require consideration within the Australian case study as prime examples of Green-Black alliances during the resource boom.

The Liverpool Plains in north-western New South Wales also witnessed new coal mines and coal seam gas projects as well as expansion of existing projects during the resource boom. The region contains fertile farmlands and falls under the native title claim of the Gomeroi people¹³⁷. The resource boom provided an opportunity for local Aboriginal people to make economic deals based on their land ownership and also effected a negotiation of farmer's relations with local Indigenous communities. The agreement making process was often characterised by lack of transparency on part of companies and confusion, criticism and dissent on the part of native title claimants. The protection of sacred sites emerged as a dominant

¹³⁷ The Gomeroi people's native title claim to a large part of northwestern New South Wales extending from the Upper Hunter to the Queensland border, to Coonabarabran and up to the Western slopes of New England was registered by the Native Title Tribunal in 2012 (Clifford 2013).

imperative for the Gomeri people's mobilisations against mining and their alliance building with farmers and environmentalists (Norman 2016).

Whitehaven Coal's Maules Creek mine in the Leard State Forest threatened the clear-felling of 4,000 acres of culturally significant and biodiverse woodlands. Whitehaven's 'incomplete and disrespectful cultural heritage process' did not allow traditional owners to properly assess cultural values at the project site (Talbot 2013, para 3.). The project met with a diverse resistance of anti-coal and green groups, farmers, traditional owners and local alliances. A permanent Leard Forest Alliance campsite was set up for two years. Mass blockades and picket lines delayed mine construction by two years (Greenpeace 2015). Non-Aboriginals showed respect for Gomeri actions for cultural protection, and signed a 'Protection Treaty' to respect the Leard Forest's cultural significance (Evans 2014; Norman 2016).

In the adjoining Pilliga State Forest, Santos's Narrabri Gas Project covering 98,000 hectares, began drilling operations for over ten wells in 2011, aiming to supply 50% of New South Wales's gas needs (Santos 2014). Although majority of Gomeri elders opposed Santos, their representative body the Narrabri Local Aboriginal Land Council who worked closely with the company supported it, causing internal conflicts in negotiations (Norman 2016). In 2013, a meeting of 400 Gomeri Traditional Owners in Tamworth took a strong stand against CSG exploration by resolving to stop all mining and development on their ancestral lands (Norman 2016).

Even though many rural communities in the region continue to be demarcated along class and race, the encroachment of mining prompted Aboriginal groups to play host to farmers with a renewed sense of alliance to country, bridging a bleak historical divide (Norman 2016). Farmers are being called on to protect Aboriginal sites and map cultural heritage on their farms when in the past they are known to have routinely destroyed such sites (Bryant 2016). While non-Indigenous landholders can be bought out by mining companies or their lands compulsorily acquired by governments, land-use change needs to be negotiated with Aboriginal

landholders, making their views and cultural continuities critical for farmers (Norman 2016). Alliances and discussions emerging from the contested situation in north-western New South Wales are considered to hold one of the best opportunities to recast environmental narratives (Peter Thompson, quoted in Norman 2016).

The three cases of alliance building between Indigenous and non-Indigenous constituents during the resource boom were characterised by a shared vision for an anti-mining future that embedded Indigenous cultural values and needs for looking after country at their centre.

6.4.7. Anti-Jabiluka mine campaign

The movement against the Jabiluka uranium mine adjoining the World Heritage listed Kakadu wetlands in the Northern Territory is considered a crowning example of an Indigenous land rights movement that pointed to new forms of empowerment, in part through mining derived income, and new potential recourse to global campaigning through strong alliances (Altman 2012a). The Ranger and Jabiluka mine lease areas are the traditional lands of the Mirrar Gundjeihmi people (Toohey 1981). In 1996, the newly elected Howard government withdrew Labor's 'Three Mines' Uranium policy that had previously prevented Jabiluka's development (Trebeck 2005, 2007). The 'Three Mines' policy had been introduced by the Labor government of Prime Minister Bob Hawke in 1984 to restrict Australia's uranium mining to the three existing mines at that time, at Ranger, Nabarlek and Olympic Dam.

The traditional owner's concerns over mining were shaped through adverse impacts and consequent erosion of cultural life from the Ranger uranium mine established in 1977¹³⁸. Their opposition to Ranger is well documented (Altman 1983; Fox et al. 1977; Levitus 1991, 2005; Wilson 1997). The traditional owners

¹³⁸ Factors contributing to the erosion of cultural life included lack of access to sites of significance within mining leases, desecration of sacred sites, and 'exclusion from effective decision-making over the interpretation of what is significant and integral to their living tradition' (GAC 2001. p.32). The anti-mining stance is characterised by considerable ambivalence to a range of institutions associated with the regulatory regime, and mine infrastructure in the region (Trebeck 2005).

invoked cultural, moral and environmental imperatives through Indigenous heritage protection, national parks and conservation, and anti-nuclear arguments to oppose the Jabiluka mine (Altman 2012a; Trebeck 2007).

The campaign incorporated Federal and High Court actions, blockades at the mine site¹³⁹, mass protests in major cities¹⁴⁰, engagement from international activist groups¹⁴¹, pressuring institutional investors¹⁴², actions against the mine owners North Ltd¹⁴³ and Rio Tinto, national and international speaking tours by Mirrar Gundjheimi, and appeals to the UNESCO World Heritage Committee¹⁴⁴ (see Trebeck 2005). Although Indigenous-green alliances have a fraught history, the presence of a clear and common interest in this case helped build successful and intricate relations with environmental NGOs and anti-nuclear activists (Altman 2012a). Majority of the Australian Senate¹⁴⁵ and many trade unions supported the movement (Trebeck 2007). The European Parliament passed a resolution in 1998 condemning Australia's decision to mine Kakadu (Gundjehmi Aboriginal Council (GAC) 2001, p. 73).

¹³⁹ In 1998, the mine proponent Energy Resources Australia's attempts at beginning construction with government support was met with a significant blockade of 5000 peaceful protestors at the mine site for eight months (GAC 2006). The mobilisation was drive by the Gundjehmi Aboriginal Council in alliance with environmental groups, political parties including the Greens and the Australian Democrats (Trebeck 2005).

¹⁴⁰ An Indigenous-environmental coalition brought national attention to the issue through multi-city protests, public meetings and anti-Jabiluka film screenings. Friends of the Earth, Wilderness Society and the Australian Conservation Foundation were the most prominent environmental groups. Many community groups also supported the movement.

¹⁴¹ 'Globalisation' of the issue was achieved through the international networks such as Friends of the Earth, the Africa-Australia Exchange, and the Global Sisterhood network, that helped to make mining without Indigenous consent a reputational risk for Rio-Tinto, the multi-national ownership-partner at Jabiluka (Trebeck 2007).

¹⁴² Pressure was applied further up the supply chain through shareholder activism. Activists targeted institutions that held North Ltd shares with anti-Jabiluka communications, achieving success in shareholding establishments selling their company shares, that eventually caused the company share price to drop by more than 65% in 1999 (Trebeck 2007).

¹⁴³ A significant four-day blockade was held outside the Melbourne headquarters of North Limited who owned ERA (Trebeck 2007)

¹⁴⁴ Engagement with the United Nations World Heritage process included traditional owner Yvonne Margarula presenting the case of cultural destruction from the Ranger mine at the UNESCO meeting in Paris in 1998, followed by the UNESCO World Heritage Mission reporting that there were significant ascertained and potential threats to Kakadu's World Heritage values following a visit (Trebeck 2007).

¹⁴⁵ The Senate's Jabiluka Enquiry advised against mining (Trebeck 2007).

The prospects of mining Jabiluka came to an end after Rio Tinto became the major owner partly on account of the company's stated objective to work with Indigenous people. A formalised agreement in 2005 effectively gave traditional owners a veto over the mine (Altman 2012a).

6.4.8. Anti-gas campaign at James Price Point

In 2009 the Western Australian government chose James Price Point on the remote Kimberley coast as the site for one of Australia's largest industrial proposals, a \$30billion processing hub for gas from the Browse Basin (Botsman 2012). The Liberal government threatened compulsorily land acquisition for the industrial precinct even while claimant groups were negotiating with the proponent Woodside over the proposed development¹⁴⁶. Both the Goolarabooloo and Jabirr Jabirr people claimed native title over the James Price Point area. In 2011, a majority of native title claimants voted for the project as a pragmatic step given the risk of compulsory acquisition (Altman 2012b).

The Goolarabooloo family group objected that the project location at James Price Point would disrupt their Songlines, burial sites, law and culture (Joseph Roe quoted in Weber 2011). In 1987, Goolarabooloo elder Paddy Roe had established the Lurujarri Heritage Trail along a section of the Song Cycle and containing sacred sites, to share cultural knowledge of the Kimberley coast (Conroy 2017). The cultural value of the diverse dinosaur footprints on the Kimberley was recognised through National Heritage Listing in 2011 (Mills 2011). Residents from Broome, the coastal economic hub in Kimberley, mobilised the 'No Gas' campaign and joined the Goolarabooloo in resistance camps along the Lurujarri trail. The movement included local, national and international ENGOS, and citizens from all over Australia. Apart from non-violent direct action to delay development at James

¹⁴⁶ 1998 amendments to the Native Title Act under Prime Minister John Howard allowed state governments to extinguish native title within their jurisdictions and to compulsorily acquire native title land for private infrastructure (Botsman 2012). The state's attempt at compulsory acquisition was subsequently invalidated through a Supreme Court ruling in 2011 based on legal action brought by Goolarabooloo and Jabir Jabir members (Pickerill 2018).

Price Point, the movement relied on political and corporate lobbying, targeting investors and legal challenges (Counteract 2013).

The movement is considered Australia's most significant and successful Indigenous-green alliance on account of the number of green groups involved, and decades long collaborations between the Goolarabooloo and environmentalists through the Lurujarri Trail (Muecke 2016). By being located along a living heritage trail through which the central institution of the Goolarabooloo – the *Bugarrigarra* – prevailed, the No Gas movement held Aboriginal modes of belonging as the central purpose of their resistance. Citizen Science projects tracked whales, turtles and endangered bilbies, incorporating ecological science and Indigenous knowledge (Muecke 2016). Although the project received state approval in 2012, Woodside withdrew in April 2013 citing commercial reasons; in August 2013 the Supreme Court of Western Australia blocked further development of the LNG processing plant at James Price Point (Wilderness Society 2013).

6.5. Analysis: Environmentalism's transformation to End(ing) Coal!

Parallel and mutually conflicting movements of the Australian government on climate change and mineral and fossil fuel extraction from the mid-1990s has forced a critical transformation of Australia's environment movement. Australian environmentalism's dominant concern has now shifted to stopping climate change through ending coal extraction. The Howard government's argument against GHG reductions on account of Australia's small net emissions had ended up becoming a hardwired logic during the following ten years that could be characterised as the swinging pendulum of Australia's climate politics.

As Australia got drawn into an unprecedented scale of globalised resource trade from the mid-1990s, its economy lost the previous balance between mining and other exports that was considered a key factor in its prosperity. During the minerals boom, a high influx of international capital and mega projects by transnational corporations, made the state's role in increasingly privileging the

extractive private sectors while passing on social and environmental risks to its own citizens evident (for example, see Bebbington et al. 2008).

Landscape level transformations wrought by a massive increase in fossil fuel extractions during the resource boom, led to widespread local conflicts and resistances. Such local resistances became incorporated into agendas of national and transnational environmental organisations, effectively generating grounds for the democratisation of environmentalism's values through a new relational, alliance-based politics and approach to tackling the environmental challenge. The process of the transformation of environmentalism was extensively shaped by the political economy of Australia's resource-exports, and in turn the movement's new politics had implications for the political economy of coal in Australia (Connor et al. 2009).

Environmentalism's approach now involved a political philosophy predicated on a solidarity that 'emphasised meeting communities where they were and building up a movement from there' (FOE Campaign Coordinator interview 20/11/2017). Two aspects of the transformation of the Australian state during the resource boom, manifested through the emergence of a new disaffected constituent of farmers, and the experience of a reconfiguration of the settler-colonial state, instead of its disappearance, from the perspective of Indigenous communities (Lyons 2019), have been key factors in the environment movement's formation of solidarities during the resource boom.

The current pragmatic approach of Australian environmentalism attempts to find common ground with other constituents against coal and coal seam gas extraction. Multiple contestations have converged around sites of coal and coal seam gas extractions during this era, making them critical geographies of resistance and giving coal-bearing regions in New South Wales and Queensland a 'scaled' meaning of place. These sites of resistance have served as building ground for environmentalism's multi-pronged and alliance-centric new approach.

Although resource extraction on Indigenous lands has increased significantly during the resource boom, the possibility to negotiate outcomes with mining corporations through the native title regime has given native title groups a bargaining power they did not have in the previous era, which has implications for today's green black relations. Articulations of Indigenous climate justice that have emerged during this era have linked to notions of sovereignty and Indigenous land rights like in the previous era (Espisto and Neale 2016). As seen in case of the anti-coal, anti-gas and anti-nuclear Green-black alliances discussed in the previous section, Indigenous-green alliances in the mining-boom era have allowed for a vision of Indigenous futures at their centre, attempting a decolonisation of their approach and narratives that was required.

The new environmentalism went back to a grassroots actions-based approach in response to the scale of the challenge of fossil fuel extraction and the inability to influence policy and politics. The emergence of farmers as a disaffected constituency during the resource boom was a key factor in transforming environmentalism's politics towards one of pragmatic solidarity. The extent of disenfranchisement of a politically conservative rural constituent was indicated through their participation in radical and direct actions against coal and coal seam gas mining, using environmentalism's tactics:

I see Lock the Gate as important because, for the first time, serious environmental issues are being taken up in a really strong way by people in the country, to the point where you've got farmers locking on to machinery and getting arrested in rural parts of New South Wales (Hutton, quoted in Robertson 2017d).

The transformation in environmentalism's politics can be seen through how the environment movement's narratives have changed on the Great Barrier Reef. The Reef has historically been at the centre of environmentalist-state conflicts. The Great Barrier Reef Marine Park was declared in 1975, after a prolonged campaign by conservation groups against its destruction by mining and other extractive activities. Australia's resource boom that unfolded even as climate impacts became

more pronounced through coral bleaching and ocean acidification, posed a double risk to the Great Barrier Reef's outstanding natural values.

Old campaigns to Save the Reef as a place worth keeping (Bonyhady 1993) became recast as a national movement to stop climate change, with the Reef being recognised as a barometer for the wellbeing of the whole planet. But in a new era of democratisation of activism following a global strategic shift, with the new anti-coal environmental movement attempting to meet local resistances where they are at rather than taking a top down approach, the grand environmental narrative of Save the Reef met criticisms from local Queensland groups struggling against massive coal mines. The latter regarded 'Fight For the Reef' national calls to action a form of 'colonisation', which did not do justice to the scale and extent of the state's coal-extraction related ecological and social crises. The dilemma of the new anti-coal environment movement's narrative on the Great Barrier Reef reflects the dynamic, contested, and deliberative process of its transformation through two decades of Australia's resource boom.

6.6. Conclusion

Australian environmentalism was transformed simultaneously through its focus on climate change and the scale and extent of Australia's minerals boom that was characterised by a massive increase in the extraction of coal and coal seam gas. While climate change per se had an effect on democratising environmentalism's values towards an understanding of environmental crisis as a human rights issue rather than saving nature from humans, the transformation of its politics towards pragmatism and solidarity and a return to grassroots activism was shaped by the scale of Australia's fossil-fuel mining during the resource boom and the necessity of confronting massive extractive projects on prime agricultural lands, and where Indigenous worlds are also present. Through embracing the class struggles of disenfranchised farmers, and through attempts at putting Indigenous visions at the centre its narratives, environmentalism was recast in the era of Australia's resource boom through a deliberative and relational politics emerging from such sites of extraction.

Chapter 7

Radicalising coal in Australia and the politics of the Carmichael coal mine

7.1. Introduction

In 2010, at the peak of Australia's mining boom, the Indian conglomerate Adani Enterprises embarked on its ambitious mission of having the largest coal mine in the southern hemisphere with the acquisition of 7.9 billion tonnes of coal assets in the Galilee Basin from Linc Energy (Murphy 2010). The new coal investments raised the possibility of there being up to nine mega-mines in the previously untapped Galilee Basin in Queensland's central west, approximately 400 kilometres inland from the Great Barrier Reef (GP Australia 2012a). Coal extracted and burnt at full capacity from all the proposed mines would make Galilee the seventh biggest emitter in the world, with the rest of Australia occupying 14th place (GP Australia 2012a).

The opening up of the Galilee Basin would deplete groundwater and aquifers of the Great Artesian Basin, affect the land rights of the Wangan and Jagalingou (W&J) traditional owners, risk native vegetation and threatened species, and physically harm the Great Barrier Reef and its associated coastal wetlands through port expansion and increased coal traffic (Environment Law Australia 2016).

The cumulative climate and environmental risks¹⁴⁷ of opening up the Galilee Basin to coalmining mobilised Australia's biggest environmental movement –consisting over 30 national and state-based organisations and over 400 local groups – that

¹⁴⁷ A Greenpeace report *Wrecking the Reef Cooking the Climate* estimated that if all nine proposals in the Galilee Basin reached production stage, they would together produce 330 million tonnes of coal per year, which when burnt could emit 705 million tonnes of carbon dioxide (GP Australia 2012b)

came together under the banner of 'Stop Adani'. The movement aimed to stop the first coal mine – the Adani-owned Carmichael – as a strategic move to stop the opening up of the entire coal-region to mining. Impacts on groundwater mobilised farmers in the Galilee region during one of the worst droughts in the continent's interiors. Adani Australia's 'disrespectful' dealings with the W&J and the state's approval and support for the Carmichael project without Indigenous consent generated a sustained Indigenous resistance under the campaign slogan 'Adani, No Means No!'.

The Galilee Basin is a 250,000 square kilometres semi-desert region in Queensland's central west, roughly the size of the United Kingdom. It is one of the world's largest coal basins holding an estimated 27 billion tonnes of thermal coal (Huleatt 1991). Plans to develop it did not eventuate until the higher coal demand and prices resulting from the minerals made extraction of coal from this remote location economically viable. Paradoxically, Australia's coal exports started declining in 2015 even as the Galilee mega mines passed through state and federal approvals, raising questions about their long-term viability (Buckley et al. 2018). Underneath the Galilee's coal seams lies the Great Artesian Basin (GAB), an ancient body of water stretching across 22% of Australia's interior and supplying freshwater to remote parts of four states (Australian Government n.d.). Farmers west of the Great Dividing Range rely on water supplies from aquifers connected to the Great Artesian Basin for their livelihoods.

The area for the proposed Carmichael mine in the Galilee Basin is the traditional lands of the W&J people, whose custodianship has extended for 'untold thousands of years' (Burrage 2018, p. viii). The W&J's traditional law, the *Kub-bah* or native Bee in their *Wiirdi* language, holds them responsible for protecting the sacred Doongmabulla Springs formed of 60 freshwater springs fed through underground aquifers by the Great Artesian Basin. Their cultural survival is tied to the health of the springs through the dreaming totem *Mundunjudra* ('Rainbow Serpent Water Spirit'), which is believed to have emerged from here to give shape to the land, rivers and waterholes of the dry Australian continent (Burrage 2018).

Carmichael, the largest proposed coal mine, comprising six open-cut and five underground mines, would cover an area of 28000 hectares, roughly five times the size of the Sydney Harbour. Initially estimated to be operational by 2014 and reach full production capacity by 2022, Carmichael would export an estimated 60 million tonnes of coal each year, operating over a lifespan of 90 years (Rolfe 2014). The ambition of the Adani Group's A16.5 billion Australian venture became evident through its proposed scale of vertical integration; a 400 kilometres long railway line would connect the mine to the Abbott Point coal port near Bowen (Queensland Government, 2016). In 2011 the Adani Group acquired a 99-year lease on the Abbott Point X50 Coal terminal (APCT) (Grant-Taylor 2011). A new coal terminal was proposed at Abbott Point port to handle the increased volumes of coal exports (Queensland Government 2015). Coal from Carmichael would be shipped to India¹⁴⁸ (Elliot 2017).

Although the environmental and Indigenous resistance, and local farmers' objections could not stop the Carmichael project, they provided crucial challenges through legal cases, political disruption, and making made major investors abandon the project. The various resistances delayed the Carmichael mine by five years, during which the size and scope of the project was significantly reduced, reflecting coal's structural decline. This chapter traces the build-up of Australia's largest mass environmental movement, mobilisations of politically conservative farmers affected by coalmining in Central Queensland, and an extensive Indigenous land-rights resistance between 2014 and 2018, a critical period in the political economy of Australian coal. During this period, the decline in global coal needs, timed with increasing civil society demands for climate action after the Paris Agreement, turned a long-held political optimism about the longevity of Australia's high quality coal exports into desperate political measures for rescuing Australia's largest proposed coal mine.

¹⁴⁸ Coal from Carmichael was initially intended for Adani Enterprise's thermal power plant in Mundra. It later emerged that Adani's Australian coal would be transported to the Adani-owned Godda thermal plant in Jharkhand in eastern India, to supply electricity to Bangladesh, based on a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) signed by the Bangladeshi government with Adani Power in 2016 (Das 2016).

Section 7.2 outlines the policy and political support for coalmining in Australia, both historically and during the resource boom, leading to the grand ambition of developing the Galilee Basin at a time of declining global coal needs and worsening effects of climate change. Section 7.3 traces the build-up of the various forms of activism of the Stop Adani environmental movement – legal, financial and grassroots and local – in response to the championing of the Adani project by successive federal and Queensland governments, between 2014 and 2018. It also outlines the emergence of farmers’ dissent from the Galilee Basin. Local farmers used legal and public forums to express concerns against the impacts of coalmining on groundwater sources that are critical for agriculture, and against political inaction on climate change.

Section 7.4 traces the build-up of the land rights conflict of the Carmichael mine and the W&J traditional owners’ land rights resistance through sustained legal campaigns, political disruptions, appeals to the United Nations and international advocacy of financial institutions associated with the Carmichael project. The conflict was shaped through the W&J people’s experiences of marginalisation by the state and the ‘inherent racism’ of native title institutions that favoured the interest of mining corporations. Section 7.5 analyses the various ways in which Australian coal was delegitimised by civil society through the conflict over the Carmichael project. Section 7.6 concludes the chapter by identifying how the anti-coal discourses of the groups resisting Carmichael are crucial to a global narrative against coal and climate change.

7.2. Contradictions of coal in Australia

Coal is Australia’s second largest export commodity after iron-ore, with 75% of coal mined in Australia exported as sea-borne coal primarily to South East Asia, Japan, China and India. Most of Australia’s coal-exports are high-quality coking coal used for manufacturing steel. Large-scale exports occur from the coal-bearing regions and adjoining ports on Australia’s eastern seaboard; from the Hunter Valley in New South Wales through the world’s largest coal port of Newcastle; and from the Bowen and Surat Basins and through Gladstone and Hay and Abbott Point

ports on Queensland's central and north coasts. To a smaller extent, brown coal is exported from Victoria's La Trobe Valley. Domestic coal is primarily used for thermal power, with 80% of Australia's electricity coming from coal (Evans 2010).

Australian coal proved valuable for sustaining the British Empire's steam-powered sea-routes in the Indian and South Atlantic Oceans. Coal from Hunter Valley in New South Wales was the first commodity to be successfully exported from colonial era Australia, making this region Australia's first export-bound commercial coal-hub (Comerford 1997). The first British settlement in the Hunter Valley was established as a convict camp for coalmining within decades following the arrival of the first fleet at Sydney Cove in 1788 (Evans 2010). The use of convict labour for coalmining in colonial New South Wales and Tasmania indicates the nexus between the coal industry and the Australian state from the earliest times (Baer 2016; Martin et al. 1993). By the mid-1800s, the colonial industries of agriculture and coalmining had dispossessed many Indigenous peoples of their lands (Blyton et al. 2004; Brayshaw 1986; Miller 1985; Turner and Blyton 1985).

7.2.1. Building 'world class' coal exports

The Commonwealth Coal Industry Act (1946) was created in response to coalmining union agitations for the nationalisation or heavy regulations of Australia's coal industry in order to protect against the 'cyclical swing in investment and capital utilisation' (Lee & Draper 1988, p. 45). After World War II, Australia created the Bureau of Mineral Resources, which sponsored geological surveys and caused a surge in mineral discoveries including coal (Coal and Mineral Industries Division 1998-1999). Australian coal exports increased in the 1950s and 1960s, partly to the reindustrialisation of Japan after World War II. Increasing coal exports to Japan were facilitated by cheaper shipping costs and lower overall prices making Australian coal a serious contender to the United States' east coast coal trade (Anderson 1971).

Unsuccessful attempts were made during the short-lived Whitlam government (1972-75) to nationalise energy resources to avoid profits from going overseas

(see Baer 2016). The efforts of 'nationalistic Australian capitalists' failed on account of the Australian business class joining hands with powerful foreign investors (Crough et al. 1983, p. 35). Governments from both major political parties have since incentivised private coal production through the approach of subsidising mining and related infrastructural developments (Baer 2016). Large state investments in port and harbour infrastructures have also encouraged mineral exports (Fagan and Bryan 1991). In NSW and Queensland, state railways carried coal from the mines to the ports, with Queensland Rail being created in 1995, and Freight Corp in NSW in 1996 (Energy Minerals Branch 1999).

Governments increased their support for coal and natural gas expansions after the 1979 oil shock (Baer 2016; Corrighan 1980; Colley 1998; Pearse 2009). In 1984 Australia became the world's largest coal exporter, overtaking the United States (Department of Resources and Energy 1986; World Coal Association 2015). Queensland's Country Party, which later became the Liberal National Party aligned its program of state developmentalism with the economic agendas of US coal multinationals Utah Development Company and Thiess Brothers, with the Department of National Development being instrumental in the prosperity of Utah (Galligan 1989, p. 121). Through this model Queensland built a 'world class' coal export industry along with new port and rail infrastructure and new towns (ibid, Baer 2016).

The close friendship between Premier Joh-Bjelke-Petersen and industrialist Les Thiess is considered a significant factor in the development of Queensland's large-scale coal industry. Large mines were governed by exclusive special agreement acts that stipulated some conditions but made environmental regulation complex, particularly owing to lack of enforcement and lack of rehabilitation by the mining companies. A strong representation of farming interests and a largely unionised rural workforce in Queensland's political economy was transformed from the 1980s through the prominence of large mining corporations with significant power over the government (Hutton 2013).

The Hawke ALP Federal government ignored the demands of the labour movement in 1987 for a National Coal Authority in order to achieve direct control over mining operations and create centralised planning of investment, mine development and productive capacity. Export controls were been implemented in response to price cutting by Utah and in response to action by mining unions. In 1986 the Hawke government worked against unions by curtailing the regulation of coal-exports (Lee et al. 1988).

Hutton (2013) notes in *Mining: The Queensland Way* that traditional approaches to analysing the state's mining-led development were either romantic accounts of the evolution of pioneering mining companies and towns, or accounts of royalties, infrastructure and benefits to local communities. Later and more critical accounts by historians such as Ross Fitzgerald have focussed on the Bjelke-Petersen government's (1968-87) corrupt culture of developmentalism that promoted mining projects that caused high social and environmental impacts (Fitzgerald 1984). The forced resettlement of the Aboriginal community of Mapoon in western Cape York Peninsula in Far North Queensland in 1963, and the subsequent closure of the Aboriginal Mission at Mapoon, after the state government granted leases for bauxite mining to Comalco corporation (which later became Rio Tinto Alcan), is regarded as one of the most significant social impacts of premiere Bjelke-Petersen's corrupt developmental approach (Fitzgerald 1984).

7.2.2. Engineering Australia's coal boom (1996–2011)

Although Australia's unprecedented coal expansions and exports from the mid-1990s were built on existent economic and infrastructural support from governments, the increasing global prices of coal and the massive foreign investments in Australian coalmining transformed the Australian political economy on a scale not seen before. During the minerals boom, major coal-bearing regions in New South Wales and Queensland were reorganised as global sites of massive coal operations, and caused pervasive social and environmental effects.

Within a decade the resource boom transformed the Hunter Valley into the

‘Carbon Valley’, responsible for one of the world’s highest per capita emissions of green house gases¹⁴⁹ (Ray 2005). As Australia’s most intensive coalmining region, 30 coal mines in the Hunter produced 100 millions tonnes of saleable coal per year, a quarter of Australia’s annual coal production (Cleary 2012). Newcastle became the world’s largest black coal exporting port (Evans 2010). Despite the significant new wealth from coalmining in the Hunter Valley, those residing close to mine sites and coal-fired power stations struggled against harmful effects on health¹⁵⁰, rural livelihoods and the environment (Connor et al. 2009).

In Queensland, coal is the largest export commodity, making up 40% of the state’s exports. Up to 71% of these exports is made up of high-quality coking coal that generates three times as much royalty for the Queensland government as the lower-grade thermal coal variety (Buckley and Nicholas 2019). Coal expansions particularly in the second decade of the coal boom developed the Central Queensland region into Australia’s largest coal producing region containing some of the largest coal mines with high foreign ownership. This led to the transformation of coastal cities such as Mackay from a sugarcane farming and processing centre into a coal-export hub. The Bowen Basin region witnessed massive coal-developments by foreign corporations such as Anglo Coal, Xstrata and Peabody Energy making it the site of some of the world’s largest coal mines (Hutton 2013).

Despite declaring climate change to be ‘the greatest moral challenge of our time’, the Kevin Rudd Labor government gave federal approval for the multi-billion dollar expansion of Queensland’s Gladstone Harbour in 2008 to enable the export of 84 million tonnes of additional coal annually (Baer 2016). Queensland spent A\$5.4 billion on a Coal Transport Infrastructure Program and the Rudd government also announced taxpayer-funded subsidies of A\$580 million to expand coal and port operations in NSW to export more than 100 million tonnes of

¹⁴⁹ The emissions would be primarily from the burning of coal extracted from the Hunter Valley in thermal plants at various global destinations.

¹⁵⁰ Health impacts studies showed that rapid mining expansions caused higher incidences of respiratory disease and depression amongst those rural communities in the Hunter Valley directly exposed to coalmining (Albrecht 2005; Ray 2007a, b; Thompson 2006). The region also recorded significantly higher levels of air pollutants than the NSW average (Connor et al. 2004).

additional coal per annum through Newcastle (Pearse 2009). These expansions included approvals for a new A\$900 billion coal port that would allow for the export of 66 million tonnes of coal per annum, which when burnt in overseas power stations would release 174 million tonnes of greenhouse gases (NSW Department of Planning, quoted in Cubby and Environment Reporter 2009).

The grounded effects of the resource boom and the risk of climate change led to the emergence of other social impacts of coal beyond the long-held narrative of prosperity and economic growth through a booming export industry.

Environmentalists argued that there are ethical and moral costs associated with Australia exporting coal, a 'dirty energy' to the world (Anvil Hill Project Watch Association 2006). Coal and coal seam gas expansions have been equated to 'an invasion of our country, a taking over of land, and a clearing out of people' (Munro 2012, p.1). Such descriptions of the extreme social and environmental effects of Australia's coal boom evoke earlier colonial dispossessions of Indigenous people on behalf of the colonial-era industries of agriculture and mining.

Previously latent contradictions of the coal-export industry became pervasive during the resource boom. Coalmining in Australia is characterised by high levels of foreign-ownership and control and an export focus, but it generates only a relatively small number of jobs (Davidson and de Silva 2013). In the previous era 'state governments insisted that corporations build housing, street, schools, hospitals, and recreation facilities if they wanted a mining licence' but coal companies were able to establish the 'fly-in-fly-out' system during the minerals boom that helped them to avoid building infrastructures for local communities (Pearse et al. 2013, p. 52). This difference indicates that the power-imbalance in the state-industry nexus has increased during the minerals boom.

7.2.3. State-industry nexus and Australia's coal optimism

Kenworthy and Gordon (2011) argue that the nexus of state and industry has facilitated coal expansions and simultaneously undermined efforts to reduce greenhouse emissions. This nexus has also sustained a coal-optimism in Australian

politics that is not commensurate with the trajectory of economic decline of coal globally since 2012. Greenhouse emissions from coal are justified on the pretext that the sector is generating significant economic benefits, and is on the cusp of resolving the emissions problem¹⁵¹ through 'clean coal' (Pearse et al 2013). Promotion of unproven and energy intensive Carbon Capture and Storage (CCS) was considered a demonstration of the state-corporate nexus¹⁵² on coal (Milne 2008). Whether through the pragmatism of Labor governments or evangelism of Liberal governments, Australia's political narratives demonstrate faith in new markets for Australian coal.

Baer (2016) argues that parts of the government effectively became a branch of the mining industry. Political donations and the revolving door between the coal industry and state emerged as dominant features of the nexus between state and the coal industry. The Australian Coal Association that promoted coal interests from NSW and Queensland was part of the 'Greenhouse Mafia' and a major donor to both the Liberal and Labor parties (Baer 2016). Another network, the Australian Greenhouse Network (AIGN) included peak bodies from fossil fuel dependent industries and large fossil fuel corporations and its lobbyists had previously shaped Australia's coal-export policies within the Hawke and Keating administrations. Journalist Guy Pearse observed that 'when carbon lobby recruits are not moving through the revolving door between government and industry, they're often moving side-ways between industry associations in a game of musical chairs' (Pearse 2009, p. 40-41).

Liberal Prime Minister Tony Abbott's term proved a period of coal idealism. Abbott declared that 'coal is good for humanity', 'vital for the future energy needs of the world', and 'should not be demonised' (Massola et al. 2014). Resources Minister

¹⁵¹ The coal industry attempted to rebrand itself from being part of the problem to being part of the solution by introducing the concept of Clean Coal. It claimed that clean coal technologies could reduce emissions from thermal power generation by up to 90% (see www.newgencoal.coam.au). The Australian Coal Association (ACA) that represents coal interest from New South Wales and Queensland formed the COAL21¹⁵¹ to raise A\$1 billion for research and development for low emissions technologies in thermal power generation through a voluntary levy on coal production (Baer 2016).

¹⁵² State assistance for clean coal through Kevin Rudd A\$100 million Global Capture and Storage Institute for research into CCS was regarded as a further subsidy for coal (Baer 2016).

Josh Frydenberg declared coal mining a moral imperative for Australia to 'help lift hundreds of millions of people out of energy poverty' (quoted in Kelly 2015). Tony Abbott's coal idealism was influenced by the global relations strategy for America's largest coal corporation Peabody Energy, whose 'Advanced Energy for Life' campaign spread awareness about coal's potential to solve energy poverty in the Global South. In a close approximation to Peabody's narrative, a report by the right-wing Australian think tank The Institute of Public Affairs (IPA) titled *The Life Saving Potential of Coal* made a case for how Australian coal could help 82 million Indians access electricity (Hogan 2015). The IPA has been found to shape the policies of the Abbott Government (Ghoukassian and Crook 2015).

Abbott talked up an altruistic vision for Australian coal and free trade:

Australia is poised to turbo-charge a rapid escalation in living standards in India through the supply of affordable and abundant energy such as natural gas, coal, and uranium...that will power the lives of 100 million Indians. It's one of the minor miracles of our time: that Australian coal could improve the lives of 100 million Indians, and it just goes to show what good that freer trade can do for the whole world' (Abbott quoted in Kenny 2014).

The fetishisation of coal continued through industry lobby groups and under subsequent Liberal governments. The Minerals Council of Australia released a multi-media advertising campaign labelled 'The Little Black Rock' (<https://littleblackrock.com.au>) extolling the benefits of coal to the economy as well as its ability to 'now reduce its emissions by 40%', which was unanimously criticised by environment groups as 'desperate' and demonstrating an '18th century' vision (Milman 2015). In another 'stunt' that received criticism, Treasurer Scott Morrison in Malcolm Turnbull's government brandished a lump of coal in Parliament in response to the backlash against coal by green groups saying 'Don't be afraid, its just coal!'. The lump was then passed around amongst cabinet ministers (Hamilton 2017).

The Liberal-National Coalition government under Prime Minister John Howard had also emphasised the increasing of combustion efficiency by using 'coals with high calorific values' available in Australia as an effective way of reducing carbon emissions (Energy Minerals Branch 1999, p. 14). These approaches were a consequence of the industry's influence on the state. The 'no-regrets' approach towards carbon emissions and a confidence in Australia's high quality coal has remained a key political stand. During the mining boom, successive governments of both the Liberal National and Labor parties in Queensland assumed a 'no regrets policy' approach towards keeping Queensland in the export-coal business, despite the possibility of severe risks to the Great Barrier Reef. Premier Campbell Newman said in response to the 2012 UN Report on the condition of the Great Barrier Reef:

We are in the coal business. If we want decent hospitals, schools and police on the beat we all need to understand that' (Newman, quoted in Australian Broadcasting Corporation 2012).

Because of the high quality of most of its coal exports, Newman and other premiers have remained confident that 'we have a competitive advantage' in a world where 'coal is going to be needed for many, many decades to come' (Newman, cited in Remeikis 2014). This contradicted a 2012 government survey of Queenslanders on a 'vision for the state beyond the next ten years' that did not feature coal as a choice for Queensland's future economy (Cole 2014). The gap indicated a widening rift between coal's industry-influenced political rhetoric and a democratic vision for Australia's energy future. The aspirations of NSW's Hunter Valley residents for a post-carbon society are demonstrated through iconic actions such as placing a 'Beyond Coal' human sign on a Newcastle beach on International Climate Day in November 2006 (Evans 2010).

7.2.4. Risky politics of planning the Galilee Basin (2012–2018)

In 2011, proposals for 120 new coal mines or extensions and a massive rail and port expansion put Australia on the verge of achieving a near three-fold increase in coal exports by 2020 (Hepburn et al. 2011). The largest of such proposed coal developments was in the greenfield site of the Galilee Basin in Central Queensland

where nine new mega mines with associated rail and port infrastructures were planned. The Queensland government also proposed the expansion of the Abbott Point coalport near Bowen to service the Galilee Basin coal mines by private developers at an estimated cost of A\$6.2 million (Paton 2011).

The Carmichael was the fourth of the nine Galilee mega mines to be approved at the state and federal levels in 2014. Alpha, the first to be approved in 2012, is a joint venture of the Indian conglomerate GVK and Australian Gina Rhinehart's Hancock Prospecting¹⁵³ and was expected to reach a full production capacity of 30 million tonnes per annum. The mine would require its own rail line to Abbott Point¹⁵⁴ (Greenpeace Australia 2012b). The Alpha minesite lay adjacent to two underground coal projects, Kevin's Corner and Alpha West, with production capacities of 27 and 24 million tonnes per annum (mtpa) respectively. The first was fully owned by GVK and the second held at a 79–21% ownership structure between GVK and Hancock similar to Alpha (Greenpeace Australian 2012b).

The Alpha North and China First sites that lay adjacent to the Carmichael mine areas were estimated to reach full production capacity of 40 mtpa. They were owned by Australian mining magnate Clive Palmer through his company Waratah Coal. The Waratah projects obtained federal approval in 2018, years after Carmichael, and were reliant on the construction of the crucial 400 kilometres North Galilee rail link connecting the mines to the coast, reaffirming the centrality of the Carmichael project to opening up the Galilee Basin (Slezak 2018b).

The proposed China Stone mine by Macmines Austasia of the Chinese-owned Menjin Energy Group equalled the size of Carmichael, with an estimated production capacity of 60 mtpa. The South Galilee Coal project, a joint venture between Australian mining exploration company Bandanna Energy and private

¹⁵³ GVK purchased most of Hancock Prospecting's coal holdings in the Galilee Basin in 2011 for A\$1.26 billion, taking their ownership of the mine to 79%. The purchase occurred even as major commodity houses downgraded their forecasts for thermal coal, creating the risks of the mine becoming a stranded asset in the future (Secombe 2014)

¹⁵⁴ The projects in the Galilee required two rail lines, one from the north to transport coal primarily from Adani's mine and the adjoining mines belonging to Waratah Coal, and another from the South for the GVK Hancock mines.

equity firm AMCI capital, constituted the smallest of the nine Galilee mega mines, at an estimated total production capacity of 14 mtpa. The Degulla mega mine proposed by the Brazilian corporation Vale, with an estimated production capacity of 35 mtpa, made up a list of five Galilee mega mines¹⁵⁵, which would be larger than any current Australian coal mine (Greenpeace Australia 2012b).

Although Australian governments have maintained optimism about for the future of coal through rhetoric of altruistic resource internationalism¹⁵⁶, economic assessments have cautioned that new massive mines risk becoming stranded assets due to decreasing coal prices¹⁵⁷, increasing affordability of solar technology, and international momentum to reduce greenhouse emissions. (Buckley and Sanzillo 2013; Dennis 2015b). China's coal demand falling in absolute terms after 2012¹⁵⁸ was regarded as a significant factor in declining sea-borne coal trade (Parker and Chang 2014). The price of Australian coal rose from 2015 not on account of a growing coal sector, but from withdrawal of investment in thermal coalmining, raising questions about Australian coal's long-term viability (Buckley et al 2018).

The Galilee mines presented an economic risk to Australia's existent major coalmining regions in the Hunter Valley in New South Wales and the Surat and Bowen Basins in Queensland. If the Galilee mines go into production, it has been estimated that there will be a reduction of up to 115 mtpa of coal output from these regions and cost 12,500 jobs (Long 2017a; Murray et al. 2018).

However, Queensland's economic policies optimistically estimated that opening the Galilee Basin would generate a one-third increase in Australia's sea-borne coal

¹⁵⁵ The other four included Carmichael, China Stone, and Clive Palmer's Alpha North and China first mines.

¹⁵⁶ The moral claim of helping India increase electricity generation and alleviate poverty emerged as a political argument to bolster Australia's slowing coal export industry (see Hogan 2015).

¹⁵⁷ In 2012, Newcastle coal prices that serve as the Australian benchmark fell to A\$74 a tonne, well below the required A\$110 price in order for mine operators to make a return on investment (Seccombe 2014). Galilee coal's high ash and low energy quality compared to the Newcastle standard – its ash content is likely double that of coal from Hunter Valley and Bowen Basin – risked further lowering Australia's coal export-prices and turning the Galilee mines stranded assets (Buckley 2016).

¹⁵⁸ China accounts for around half the world's coal consumption, and between 2007 and 2012, China accounted for all the growth in global coal use.

trade. Galilee constituted one of the four pillars for Queensland's growth with an estimated A\$60 billion in revenue generation and the creation of 15,000 jobs (Queensland Government 2013). The Galilee Basin Development Strategy (2013) waived mining royalties¹⁵⁹, streamlined land acquisition and fast-tracked project approvals. The state facilitated railways and port infrastructure developments for the greenfield mining region by the declaration of the Galilee Basin State Development Area (SDA) in 2014. Stretching over 100,000 hectares from Abbott Point to the proposed Carmichael site, it was Queensland's largest SDA, dwarfing previous ones by more than a factor of 10 (Lyons 2017a).

The Newman government proposed spending hundreds of millions of taxpayer funds for the Galilee's rail infrastructure (Cox 2015a). It proposed subsidising the expansion of the Abbott Point coal port by spending public money for seabed dredging and dumping dredge spoils inside the Great Barrier Reef World Heritage Area (Market Forces 2014). More spending on mining by the Newman government meant less spending on social infrastructures including hospitals and schools (Dennis 2015b).

Internationally, the Galilee Basin was singled out as being on the 'frontline of expansion' of the coal industry, stopping what should be made a priority in order to keep global warming below the required two degrees limit to meet the requirements of the Paris Climate Agreement (Muttitt 2016). The risks posed by the Galilee mega mines to the global climate, led to them being referred as 'carbon bombs', with the Carmichael mine imagined as a 'line in the sand'. Allowing it to go ahead risked the world's climate 'tipping over' (Mckibben 2017).

The Carmichael coal mine stood out as the only significant export-oriented project from a new coal basin anywhere in the world (International Energy Agency 2017), underscoring the economic risk of developing the Galilee coal region. Hunter Valley in New South Wales had already started facing the impacts of declining coal demand even as the Carmichael coal mine progressed through state and federal

¹⁵⁹ The Newman government waived billions of dollars in royalty collections in the early stages of the Carmichael mine to stimulate the Galilee Basin's development (Dennis 2015b).

approvals. The drop in global coal prices in 2017 forced Australia's major coal producing regions to undertake production cuts (Cox 2015c). Resonances for withdrawal from coal started coming from within the industry, with Newcastle, the world's largest coal port, preparing to diversify beyond coal (Smyth 2017), and Australia's largest coal mining company Glencore committing to cap its coal output (Khadem 2019). The 2017 climate policy of Australia's second largest bank, Westpac limited financing of new thermal coal projects to existing coal-producing basins (Westpac 2017).

By the end of 2018, the ambition of Queensland and Australian governments to unleash the continent's largest coal frontier remained unrealised. Several other project developers in the Galilee Basin have either been waiting for years or have sold their stake. Vale, a Brazilian mining company that was one of the original nine, put its lease up for sale in 2013. The licence for the China Stone mega mine adjoining Carmichael was quietly withdrawn, putting thousands of the promised Galilee jobs at doubt (Gartry 2019).

The only other projects gearing up for approvals from the Queensland government when the Adani coal mine finally started were those belonging to Clive Palmers' Waratah Coal Company. Shrinking investments in coal projects also affected prospects of expansions at the Abbott Point coal port, with large infrastructure developers such as Land Lease and large mining corporations such as BHP Billiton and Rio Tinto withdrawing as developers due to uncertainties in the global market (South Asia Times 2014).

The coal industry's influence on Australian politics was revealed through the sweeping success of the Liberal-National Coalition in Queensland in May 2019, after which the last remaining environmental approvals for Adani were granted by the State Labor government, allowing the mine to officially commence. During the federal election campaign in Queensland, mining magnate Clive Palmer funded a misleading advertising campaign against the Labor Party to polarise the electorate (Crowe 2019). The News Corp media's monopoly throughout the region also proved effective in influencing opinions; its newspapers had mounted a sustained

propaganda campaign for the Carmichael mine (Wilson 2018). Australia's most controversial coal mine started despite its economic unviability. The political manoeuvring and democracy fixing needed to open up the Galilee Basin demonstrated the grip of the coal industry on Australian politics despite its sinking global future.

7.3. Environmental politics of the Carmichael coal mine (2012–2018)

As the largest proposed coal mine, and the one seen as unlocking other mining operations in the Basin, the Carmichael project triggered all the environmental risks that concerned scientists and ENGOs. To its opponents, the sheer scale of the combined impacts from the Carmichael mine, rail and port project and calculated emissions from burning its coal (Amos and Swann 2015) implied it should never be approved (Waters 2015). Coal from the Carmichael mine alone would create an estimated average annual emission of 79million tonnes of carbon dioxide, a figure greater than the average emissions of Bangladesh or Sri Lanka (Taylor 2015).

The Independent Expert Scientific Committee (IESC) on coal seam gas and large coal mining developments to Queensland and Federal governments expressed concerns about the impacts of the Carmichael mine's water use on the Great Artesian Basin. Scientific uncertainty around the architecture of the Great Artesian Basin and its connected aquifers that hydrologists had not yet fully mapped made it difficult to ascertain the full water impacts of the Galilee mines (IESC 2013, Australian Broadcasting Corporation 2014). Uncertainty prevailed over assessing the impacts of the Carmichael mine on the source of the nationally important wetlands the Doongmabulla Springs complex sacred to the W&J people. An IESC assessment warned that since not enough was known about how coal seams connected to the GAB, the true impacts of mining on such scale could not be determined. It also stated it had little confidence in Adani's modelling.

The better-known hydrological risks of the Galilee projects pertained to the quantity of water required for coalmining. The report *Draining the Lifeblood* by

Lock the Gate (LTG) estimated that the nine mega mines would need 2000 gigalitres of water cumulatively over their lifetimes, a volume higher than two and a half Sydney Harbours. This risked an estimated 400 bores on surrounding farming properties and the water for nearby towns of Alpha and Jericho by drawing down the underground water table (Lock the Gate 2013). A former Queensland Water Bureaucrat explained that:

The pits of the mines are lower than the actual aquifers, so they will drain out. One of the other concerns we have and we think there is a fairly high potential for some impacts on the recharge of the Great Artesian Basin...So far there has been no study done and the approvals are still going ahead...What we should be looking at is a stop on any further approvals until we get a cumulative study done of the impacts (Crothers 2013).

The Carmichael coal mine would draw an estimated 12 billion litres of water every year (IESC 2013), and a total of 270 billion litres over its lifetime (Mckeown 2018). The scale of the project's water-needs risked causing a one-metre drop in the water table, and draining the aquifers connected to the GAB along with the springs and wetlands that feed off them, during droughts. Adani's own experts admitted that even temporary drying of the Doongmabulla Springs risked causing irreversible ecological changes (see *Adani v Coast and Country* 2015). Contaminated water from the mine risked polluting creeks and rivers (Mckeown 2018). Destruction of the springs would threaten the cultural survival of the W&J people and the possibility of downstream effects on other traditional owners with stories and connections through the Water Spirit ancestor would risk fragmenting the 'seamless web of cultural landscape in Aboriginal law and lore' (Burrage 2018, p. ix).

The project was also dogged by controversies over actual taxes and local jobs it can generate, with legal cross-examinations revealing that the company inflated claims by 270% (Ludlow 2015). Legal challenges by civil society groups to the Carmichael

mine and rail¹⁶⁰ exposed the impacts of the mine on groundwater and biodiversity, the burning of coal for climate change, risks to the Great Barrier Reef from port and coal expansions, and the economic unviability of the mine (Environmental Law Australia 2016).

The Carmichael mine and rail proposals emerged and gathered shape during the federal Labor leadership of Prime Minister Julia Gillard (2010–2013) and the Queensland Labor premiership of Anna Bligh (2007–2012). They received approvals under the Liberal Prime Minister Tony Abbott (2013–2015) and Liberal National Party (LNP) Premier Campbell Newman (2012–2015). It received a second federal approval under Malcolm Turnbull. The project was helped along against growing civil society opposition and financial withdrawal by major investors by successive Liberal Prime Ministers Malcolm Turnbull (2015–2018) and Scott Morrison (2018 onwards) and successive terms of Labor Premier Anastasia Palaszczuk (first term from 2015–2017 and re-election in 2017).

A combination of investor and shareholder activism to divest from the Adani-project, grassroots mobilisations exerting political pressure at the electoral level in both Labor and Liberal seats around the country, legal actions, alliances with disaffected farmers in Central Queensland sustained a five-year resistance, caused critical delays, and proved effective in drastically reducing the size of the ambitious Carmichael project. A significantly diminished Carmichael project finally commenced after the decisive Australian federal election in May 2019. In the following weeks, the Queensland Labor government controversially approved last remaining environmental and water plans. The following subsections 7.3.1, 7.3.2, 7.3.3 and 7.3.4 chronologically trace the political championing of the Carmichael mine at the state and federal levels and account for how the environmental and political conflict over the Carmichael mine shaped Australia's largest

¹⁶⁰ A total of ten legal challenges mounted between 2014 and 2020 by environmental groups against the Carmichael mine and the expansion of the Abbott Point port which is associated with the project, have either been defeated in the courts, or their outcomes have been unable to stop the project from proceeding. See <http://envlaw.com.au/carmichael-coal-mine-case/>. The W&J traditional have mounted a separate and extensive legal campaign under the native title regime, which has been struck down by the courts. The W&J legal challenges are discussed in the next section. See www.adaninomeansno.com.

environmental and climate mobilisation and a farmers' campaign in Central Queensland.

7.3.1. State and federal Liberal governments' championing Adani

The project received its first environmental approvals in 2014, with the Queensland Coordinator General recommending the state government approve the project with an 'extensive and wide-ranging' set of conditions to ensure environmental protections (Howells 2014) under the *Minerals Resources Act 1989* (QLD MRA) and the *Environment Protection Act 1994* (QLD EPA) (Queensland Government 2014). The Federal Environment Minister similarly approved the project under the 'the absolute strictest of (36) conditions¹⁶¹', in fact the 'strictest conditions in Australian history' (Minister Hunt quoted in Hasham 2015) under the *Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999* (EPBC).

Queensland's fast-tracked approval process failed to consider the IESC's water-advice and to scrutinise the company's track record of environmental harm in India¹⁶² (Environment Justice Australia 2015). The Federal approval for Carmichael was immediately followed by the first legal challenge against the project, with the Mackay Conservation Group (MCG) seeking a judicial review of the Environment Minister's decision on account of the mine's impacts on two vulnerable species – the Yakka Skink and Ornamental Snake – under the EPBC Act. The Federal Court of Queensland set aside Adani's federal approval, requiring the Australian Environment Minister to follow procedural requirements in reissuing an approval (Hepburn et al. 2015).

Prime Minister Tony Abbott labelled environmental litigations against the Carmichael mine as a 'green sabotage' and attempted¹⁶³ to repeal section 487 of

¹⁶¹ The environmental conditions can be accessed from: <http://www.environment.gov.au/epbc/notices/assessments/2010/5736/2010-5736-approval-decision.pdf>.

¹⁶² A report by Earthjustice and Environment Justice Australia, based on an investigation of hundreds of court documents on Adani's corruption, destruction and criminal activity, highlighted the destruction of mangroves, non-compliance with environmental conditions and illegal developments at the port of Mundra in Gujarat, amongst others (adanifiles.com.au).

¹⁶³ The government's legislative amendment bill was defeated in the Federal Senate during the Abbott government but subsequently revived by the Turnbull government (Hepburn 2016).

the EPBC Act that contains provision to seek judicial reviews¹⁶⁴, on grounds of protecting jobs (Hepburn 2015; Latimer 2015). Government narratives also presented Carmichael as a solution to India's historic poverty and a milestone in Australia-India relations. This message was reinforced through the News Corp media in an article evocatively titled 'Gautam Adani's dream to light India's darkened nights', in *The Australian*, a national daily with a right-centre bias:

Last year, Modi promised in his Independence Day speech to provide electricity to the estimated 18,000 villages still in the dark — with a combined population of 300 million people — by 2019. Playing a significant part in delivering this transformation is Adani, and its plans for Australia. Its founder, self-made billionaire university dropout Gautam Adani, wants to build the A\$16 billion Carmichael mine in Central Queensland — producing up to 60 million tonnes a year of coal — to help satisfy the growing electricity demand in India (McKenna 2016).

Political support was also justified through claims that high-quality Galilee coal when burnt in India will improve air quality and lower emissions. A second litigation against Carmichael challenging Queensland's environmental approval brought by the Coast to Country local group challenged such moral overtures around the project (Adani Mining Pty Ltd v Land Services of Coast and Country Inc. & Ors 2016). An Indian environmentalist from the Mumbai based Conservation Action Trust testified that 'coal from Carmichael, when burnt in Adani's power stations in India, will damage the health of the Indian rural poor and the land and water on which they depend for their livelihoods. And they still won't be able to access the electricity generated' (quoted in Environment Justice Australia 2014).

Ironically, a report submitted on behalf of Adani on the case at Queensland's Land Court refuted the high-quality claim for Carmichael coal, confirming it was a high ash and low energy product. The publically claimed 10,000 jobs figures¹⁶⁵ from the project was also disproved through Adani's own modelling presented on the case

¹⁶⁴ Section 487 pertains to the matter of standing, the legal term that decides the eligibility of a party to bring a legal case.

¹⁶⁵ Adani advertised on regional Queensland television channels that the rail and mine would generate 10,000 direct and indirect jobs.

that revealed the figures as closer to 1500 (Adani Mining Pty Ltd v Land Services of Coast and Country Inc. & Ors 2015). Such findings challenged government position on the economic significance of Carmichael. Queensland had already declared the Carmichael coal and rail plan a significant project that could generate over 11,000 jobs in 2010 (SBS News 2016). The evidence presented in court indicated that the government had put public money at risk for opening up the Galilee Basin which would fail to deliver what it promised.

During his Australian visit during the G20 Summit in 2014, Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi reportedly cleared a funding roadblock for Carmichael through a memorandum of understanding (MOU) for a A\$1 billion loan¹⁶⁶ from the State Bank of India, India's public bank (ENS 2014). The Newman government matched this by announcing an A\$450 million investment for the rail project (Dennis 2015b). The Newman government's championing and subsidising of Carmichael was contradicted by Queensland Treasury's concerns over Adani's high levels of debt, unclear corporate structure and use of offshore tax havens (Cox 2015b). In February 2015, Premier Newman lost to Labor after a single term in one of the biggest swings in Australian politics, with mining and accountability proving key factors¹⁶⁷ in the defeat (Dennis 2015b).

7.3.2. Queensland Labor's first term and special favours for Adani

Queensland Labor committed to not subsidise the Carmichael project, requiring the Galilee coal mines to be commercially viable. Although the ideological rhetoric around coal dimmed down during Labor Premier Annastacia Palaszczuk's term, special favours still flowed to Carmichael mine. The legal challenge in the Land Court concluded in December 2015 with a ruling that an environmental authority and mining lease can be granted to Adani subject to further conditions related to monitoring the impacts on the Black Throated Finch species endemic to the area (Environmental Law Australia 2016). The court verdicts in the first two cases had

¹⁶⁶ Five months later, news reports indicated that the MOU between the SBI and the Adani group had died a natural death. The MOU had stirred a controversy, with the Indian opposition dubbing this as an instance of crony capitalism (Bandyopadhyay 2015)

¹⁶⁷ Campbell Newman's term was subjected to a Federal Senate Inquiry for corruption, human rights and environmental neglect (Dennis 2015b).

favoured Adani, indicating that the ‘the system is designed to expedite’ over a range of social and economic concerns (Lyons 2017a).

The third legal case against Carmichael was launched in November 2015 following its federal reapproval. In *Australian Conservation Foundation Incorporated v Minister for the Environment and Energy [2017] FCAFC 134*, the national ENGO Australian Conservation Foundation challenged that the mining and burning of coal from Carmichael was inconsistent with Australia’s obligation to protect the World Heritage Listed Great Barrier Reef under the EPBC Act (van Vonderen 2015). Heeding the court challenge, Commonwealth, a major Australian bank, withdrew from its financial advisory role to the project (West and Cox 2015). Adani reportedly asked Prime Minister Malcolm Turnbull to introduce legislation to prohibit activists from challenging approvals, alleging that judicial reviews had delayed the project by one and a half years and made investors unwilling to associate with it (Cox 2015c).

Queensland steered the project towards completion regardless of investor withdrawals. In February 2016 following the Land Court verdict, Queensland granted Adani’s final environmental authority – the licence needed by the proponent to commence a project with significant environmental impacts – with 140 conditions under Queensland’s *Environment Protection Act 1994* (Agius 2016). Carmichael was declared a critical infrastructure, a status granted only four other times¹⁶⁸ and never to a private commercial development (Environment Defenders Office (EDO) Queensland 2016a). The manoeuvre allowed Queensland to fast track water assessments and exempt Adani’s water use from public scrutiny (EDO Queensland 2016b). Queensland based ENGOs saw this as problem of state accountability:

The State Development and Public Works Act (under which Adani was granted critical infrastructure status) came under Bjekle Petersen; it was designed in hard times to build public interest infrastructure, even if local communities were affected. But now it is hollowed out and private

¹⁶⁸ Three out of these related to water supply infrastructures that were declared critical during record low water levels.

operators like Adani benefit. It comes back to accountability issue, to democracy (ex-Coordinator Mackay Conservation Group (MCG) interview 28/10/2017)

The local group Land Services Coast and Country launched the fourth legal challenge, against the granting of the environmental authority for Carmichael, arguing that the Queensland government had considered the requirement for sustainable development under the state's Environment Protection Act (Environmental Law Australia 2016). In April 2016 Queensland approved Carmichael's mining licences with 200 'strict conditions', emphasising that the 'benefits (from Carmichael) outweigh those challenges' (Australian Broadcasting Corporation 2016a). Although State and federal governments cleared all approvals by the end of 2016 by giving a go ahead to the rail line and mine site construction camp, Adani's April 2017 deadline for starting the project appeared unlikely given the pending third and fourth legal cases (Mitchell-Whittington 2016).

After facing public criticism, Adani changed its initial plan of locating all project offices in the state capital Brisbane and economically prioritised Central Queensland (Australian Broadcasting Corporation 2016b). Townsville was announced as Adani Australia's regional headquarters and remote operations centre (O'Brien and Mellor 2016). A Queensland based ENGO spokesperson provided a ground level account of how Adani influenced city councils in Central Queensland:

Adani has been spinning their tale on the ground, working very intensely with the local councils over the last two years with all the national level resistance going on. With local mines, refineries closing, local government looked at Adani as the saviour. And Adani has been stringing councils along; 'who will get the head quarters?'. There is a soap opera playing out in the local media (Mackay Conservation Group Coordinator interview 28/10/2017).

In March 2017 Premier Palaszczuk led a delegation of Mayors from regional centres to Mundra in Gujarat, India for a tour of Adani's coal port, thermal power

plants, and the special economic zone. A protest-delegation of two ENGO representatives, a Reef tourism operator, and a Queensland farmer shadowed the government delegation to India. The delegation delivered an open letter signed by 90 prominent Australians and traditional owners that asked Gautam Adani to abandon the Carmichael project to Adani's corporate headquarter in Ahmedabad, Gujarat (Cousins 2018). In the same month, various strands of anti-Adani environmental activism, including grassroots and constituency based opposition, divestment campaign, and national political advocacy and legal activism, officially came together under the Stop Adani banner. The movement website summed up its approach to activism as 'We must generate unprecedented, relentless and organised political pressure, through targeted community organising and sustained creative mobilising' (www.stopadani.com).

In April 2017 Queensland granted Adani a licence to extract unlimited groundwater (Hannam 2017). While acknowledging that the mine will impact underground water levels, the government defended the licence on the basis that it had set an extensive set of 270 conditions in the approval to protect groundwater (Davison 2017). However, experts pointed out that conditions had not set volumetric limits on water withdrawals or triggers to halt mining operations when required¹⁶⁹. Adani's groundwater plan ignored the scientific uncertainty of the Artesian Basin¹⁷⁰ and risked the Doongmabulla wetlands being completely drained by mining (Robertson 2018a).

The water licence was granted in the midst of what has been described as the worst drought in living memory in Central Queensland (Australian Broadcasting Corporation Rural 2018). A petition started by a third generation grazier from Longreach in outback Queensland demanded to 'Rescind Adani's Unlimited Water Licence and Support Aussie farmers'. Pointing to the prolonged Queensland

¹⁶⁹ ENGOs highlighted that requiring a company that could not be trusted to monitor its own groundwater impacts and take action based on make-good agreements with affected landholders appeared risky. Landholders had been unable to arrive at make-good agreements with mining project proponents in the Galilee Basin in other instances (Extel 2016).

¹⁷⁰ Two separate Federal Government groundwater studies conducted since Adani gained Commonwealth environmental approval in 2014 have still not been able to trace which of the two adjoining underground aquifers feeds the springs.

drought, the petition to Premier Palaszczuk asked ‘nearly 90 % of Queensland is currently drought declared, so why are we giving an Indian billionaire access to unlimited groundwater for a new coal mine?’ (Change.org 2017).

Queensland compulsorily acquired prime agricultural land for the Adani railway, sparking concerns about the division of rural properties¹⁷¹ (Elliot 2017). Another petition launched by a Galilee grazier in October 2017 attempting to stop the compulsory acquisition of grazing land for Adani’s rail line drew 44,000 signatures (Smith 2018). Farmers for Climate Action (FFCA), a new national alliance between farmers and environmentalists initially formed in 2015, became a critical voice against massive water allocations to the Galilee mines and the lack of federal action on climate during this time as one of the most severe droughts affected farmers and graziers in Central Queensland (FFCA 2018).

Despite a clear election commitment against giving handouts to Adani, the Labor government sent contradictory signals on the matter of royalties from the Carmichael mine. A new royalty deal was issued with a clarification that the Queensland cabinet had ‘unanimously agreed [that] ...Adani’s Carmichael mine will pay every cent of royalties in full...there will be no royalty holiday’ (Caldwell 2017a). News reports however contradicted this assertion, indicating a reduced holiday on royalties for six years (Robertson 2017b). An Australian Greens’ analysis showed the deferral would cost an A\$253 million over five years (Caldwell 2017b).

Funding for the Carmichael project remained unresolved despite Adani’s final investment ruling announced after the royalty deal, owing significantly to activist campaigns. The divestment campaign arm of the Stop Adani movement led by 350.org Australia and the new divestment activism group Market Forces. Market Forces and the W&J traditional owners undertook a tour of international banks and investors across the US and Europe in 2015 (Market Forces 2015). The

¹⁷¹ Fragmentation of rural properties caused discontent within Queensland’s Liberal National Party that had otherwise unequivocally supported and subsidised the Galilee projects. During Campbell Newman’s term, Vaughan Johnson, Liberal National member for the Central Queensland electorate of Gregory that covers the Adani mine had raised the concerns of his farmer constituents (SBS News 2016).

'National Day of Divestment Action' in October 2016 that focussed on the 'Big 4 Australian Banks'¹⁷² to stop funding fossil-fuel projects saw people from across 13 cities around Australia participating in a mass protest by cancelling their bank memberships (Market Forces 2016). The divestment campaign successfully convinced all four major Australian banks to withdraw from the Carmichael project (Robertson 2017a).

The financial situation raised strong possibilities of political handouts, particularly a A\$1billion Federal loan to the Adani rail project through the federally administered Northern Australian Infrastructure Facility (NAIF)¹⁷³ fund (Koziol and Wroe 2016). Queensland Labor however repeated its previous election stand of not publically funding to project. Following re-election in December 2017, Premier Anastacia Palaszczuk vetoed the federally administered and contentious A\$1 billion NAIF loan for Adani's rail project¹⁷⁴ (Australian Broadcasting Corporation 2017).

7.3.3. Queensland Labor's second term; equivocating on Carmichael

The period after re-election heralded a change in Labor's stance towards the Carmichael mine if not towards coalmining per se. Even as the state Premier continued to handhold Adani such as through the reported offer to fund A\$100 million for road access to the Carmichael mine (Robertson 2018b), Federal Labor leader Bill Shorten spoke about diversifying Central Queensland's economy through local infrastructures to deliver real jobs (Murphy 2018c) and warned against the promise of 'fake jobs' from a project that was yet to take off (Brunker 2018). Following the Paris Agreement, Federal Labor raised concerns about investment risks posed by the Galilee mines, and about the Carmichael mine being

¹⁷² The four major Australian banks are the Australian New Zealand Bank, the Commonwealth Bank, then National Australian Bank and finally Westpac.

¹⁷³ NAIF is a Federal agency set up in mid-2016 to offer A\$5 billion in concessional loans to projects in Queensland, the Northern Territory and Western Australia. NAIF board members' links to the mining industry represent a conflict of interest. Analysis by the Australia Institute highlighted concerns with the processes and disclosure of NAIF compared to other government organisations, its strong conflict of interest, and no scrutiny over the public interest requirement of projects (Swann 2017).

¹⁷⁴ State governments have the final power to either authorise or reject the NAIF loan.

the only coal project from a greenfield region anywhere in the world (Butler 2018).

In preparation for the 2019 Federal election, Labor considered inserting a climate trigger into the EPBC Act that could be used to prevent new coal mines, or even provide a retrospective negative assessment of an existing mine, on the basis of its emissions (Murphy 2018a). This would act in a similar fashion to the water trigger that Labor inserted into the EPBC Act in 2012 to contain the effects of CSG mining on groundwater. Australian laws currently do not provide for the emissions (on coal-burning) of coal mines to be considered for approvals.

Labor faced pressure from the Green Party¹⁷⁵ to show a stronger stand on climate change and the issue of the Carmichael mine (Wahlquist 2018). The Stop Adani movement that formally started in March 2017 had also effectively made the Carmichael mine an electoral-level issue nationally. However Trade Unions posed the biggest challenge to Labor's policy of tackling coal expansions¹⁷⁶. The Construction, Forestry, Mining, Maritime, Mining and Energy Union (CFMEU), Labor's biggest internal stakeholder, warned that a hardline approach against the Carmichael coal mine could alienate Labor's blue-collar base by sending a signal that Labor is against 'any new coal' (Murphy 2018b).

Labor attempted to balance both sides through the official position that the Carmichael mine could go ahead on its own merit. However, even though at the federal level the Party equivocated on the controversial Carmichael coal mine, in Queensland, Australia's largest coal state, the Labor government quietly revived plans to expand coalmining in the adjacent Bowen Basin (Smee 2018a). This incident demonstrated the ineffectualness of Labor's balanced approach against the reality of the clout of the coal industry.

¹⁷⁵ The Greens appeared poised to win the longest held federal Labor seat of Batman in Melbourne in a March 2018 by-election. The Party mounted a campaign to 'Stop Labor's Adani mine' challenging the Queensland Labor government to abandon the Carmichael project (Wahlquist 2018). The Greens had also challenged Queensland Labor on the Carmichael issue during the 2017 state elections in South Brisbane.

¹⁷⁶ They were the factional forces behind the removal of Prime Minister Kevin Rudd from Prime Ministership in 2010 (Eltham 2012).

7.3.4. Federal Liberal-National Coalition government's political rescue for Carmichael

After prospects for a NAIF loan for Carmichael faded, the Federal Liberal government attempted to rescue the financially unviable project by attempting to broker international financing at Adani's behest. Freedom of Information documents revealed that the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade wrote to the Chinese Embassy and met officials from Korea's Export-Import (EXIM) Bank (Slezak 2018a). Chinese banks reportedly ruled out involvement with the project owing to financial unviability and following weeks of targeted campaigning by ENGOs (Needham 2017).

In 2018 Adani proposed a separate water project through the 'North Galilee Water Scheme' to pump 12 billion litres of water from the nearby Sutton River for non-extractive activities such as washing coal (Hasham 2018). The company avoided¹⁷⁷ a full impact assessment for the scheme under the water trigger of the EPBC Act, a move that angered local farmers struggling during one of the worst droughts (Lock the Gate 2018). The Federal government issued a rushed approval for the water scheme weeks before the May 2019 federal elections that was challenged by water experts and ENGOs (Long and Slezak 2019). The Australian Conservation Foundation launched a fifth legal challenge against this approval process since it failed to take 'thousands of public submissions into account' in violation of the EPBC Act (Australian Conservation Foundation 2019). Although the federal government conceded that due process had not been followed (i.e. ACF won), in a similar pattern to earlier litigations against approvals issued without following due process under the EPBC Act, the environment minister reissued the approval at a later date stating that it had now taken public submissions into account.

By 2018 the Adani Group significantly scaled down its mine and rail projects. The mine was scaled down to a 10-15 million tonnes a year self-financed project at A\$2

¹⁷⁷ The company claimed that since the water was not required for coal extraction, it should be exempt from scrutiny under the water trigger of the EPBC Act.

billion (Talukdar 2018c). The new rail proposal halved capital costs to A\$1billion by reducing the railway to 200 kilometres to connect with Aurizon's existing rail to Abbott Point (Ludlow 2018). Adani's design and engineering partner AECOM demobilised from the rail project in May 2018, after it was unable to gain access to key sites in order to progress its design work (Smee 2018b). A volunteer run activist outfit Galilee Blockade mounted a sustained campaign including blockades and shareholder activism¹⁷⁸ against Adani's principal engineering and construction partner Downer EDI to disrupt mine construction. Adani finally scrapped its agreement with the construction firm around the time of the NAIF loan veto (Sydney Morning Herald 2017). Persistent direct disruptions by Galilee Blockade volunteers had also contributed to AECOM's demobilisation.

The Adani Group also significantly scaled down its Abbott Point expansion¹⁷⁹, proposing a conveyor and transfer tower at the existent Terminal One to increase coal throughput by 10 million tonnes a year (Smee 2018d). The A\$1.8 billion investment in the Coal Terminal is considered Adani's key asset in Australia and the reason why the conglomerate has not walked away from the Carmichael project (ibid). However, with the Australian bank Westpac declining to refinance Adani's A\$2 billion loan on the Port in December 2017 as per its new climate policy, the viability of Adani's entire operations became questionable (Slezak 2017c). Abbott Point also faced the risk of a stop order being issued on its operations if the concerns of the Juru traditional owners from North Queensland were not met¹⁸⁰ (Smee 2018c)

¹⁷⁸ Volunteers for Galilee Blockade became Downer shareholders and forced a special resolution to be voted in the company's annual general meeting. The resolution sought to amend Downer's constitution by inserting a clause that directors should 'ensure that the business of the company is managed in a manner consistent with the objective of holding global warming to below 2 degree Celsius above pre-industrial levels' (Robertson 2017g).

¹⁷⁹ The proposal for terminal two had already been downsized and deferred. Terminal two would have required dredging and other works to increase its capacity to 90 million tonnes a year and had met with strong concerns from scientist and environmental groups (Smee 2018d).

¹⁸⁰ Traditional owners were concerned that sacred sites within the Abbott Point State development area have not been properly protected. It was reported that Adani repeatedly ignored the demands of the Juru Enterprise Limited, the Indigenous business nominated to represent traditional owners on land use agreements with Adani, to conduct cultural inspections in the Abbott Point state development area, compelling them to threaten an attempted shut down of the port through a stop order (Smee 2018c).

The federal elections in May 2019 and its ramifications for the Labor Party in Queensland turned the tide on the prospects of the Carmichael coal mine. As opposed to federal Labor's pre-election position that the mine should proceed on its own merit, the Queensland Labor government now categorically stated it was 'fed-up of waiting' and hastened Adani's pending clearances (Bavas 2019). Final environmental approval was granted in June and Adani commenced Australia's most controversial coal mine. The multi-pronged campaign against the Carmichael mine moved towards a greater emphasis on peaceful blockades in Queensland as all other tactics failed to stop the coal mine. Camp Binbee, an 18-month long blockade camp located a 45 minutes drive west of Bowen began to swell with volunteers of all ages and various walks of life at the time of the final decision (Krien 2019a), in preparation for blockading the port, rail and mining activities.

The difference in approach towards the Adani-mine between Liberals and Labor since 2017 was far outweighed by the consistency of their support. This can be attributed to the company's relations with leaders in both major parties¹⁸¹ (Readfearn 2015). The state-corporate nexus was strengthened by the culture of revolving doors between politics and mining. Adani's lobbying firm was led by former chiefs of staffs in both Labor and Liberal offices at state and federal levels¹⁸² (Robertson 2017e). It helped Adani get 'pretty much everything it wanted through an extraordinarily intense campaign', making more than double the number of contacts with the government on behalf of Adani compared to any other client¹⁸³ (Long 2017b). Relations were further strengthened through political

¹⁸¹ Reports of Queensland and Australian trade missions to India revealed that leaders have been meeting Gautam Adani since 2010. In 2012 a 76-member business delegation led by Campbell Newman was flown in a private jet to Mundra. The delegation was given a tour of Adani's port and plant and hosted at a lavish reception at Gautam Adani's residence. The March 2017 trip of regional mayors and Premier Palaszczuk to Bhuj has also been criticised as a taxpayer funded 'junket' to court Adani's business (Readfearn 2015).

¹⁸² Cameron Milner and David Moore headed the lobbying firm next Level Strategic Services. David Moore worked on Campbell Newman's victorious campaign in 2012 before leaving to start the lobbying services firm. Cameron Milner, a former state Labor secretary, also served as chief of staff to Federal Labor leader Bill Shorten. He played a controversial double role in Queensland by working as a lobbyist for Adani and then working on Labor Premier Palaszczuk's re-election campaign.

¹⁸³ An Australian Broadcasting Corporation analysis of the Queensland lobbyist register and found that the firm had made 33 lobbying contacts for Adani between 2015 and 2017, which was more than double the number of contacts reported for any other client. The firm's campaign was most intense when the royalty deal was being finalised in May 2017 (Long 2017b).

donations: disclosures lodged with the Australian Electoral Commission showed that Adani donated A\$49,500 to the Liberal Party and A\$11,000 to Labor in 2013-2014 (Cox 2015a).

The nine-year period, from when Adani first purchased the coal tenements in the Galilee Basin to when the company could finally start the project, has spanned one of the most momentous periods in Australia's coal and climate politics. The converse is equally true. The Carmichael mine both united and divided Australian politics, and led to an outpouring of civil society protests.

7.3.5. Activisms, narratives and politics of Stop(ping) Adani

Legal challenges continued even after the project started in 2019. The sixth case by ACF in 2020 against the federal government, for Adani's new water project for the Carmichael mine (discussed in subsection 7.3.4) not having been assessed under the water trigger in the EPBC Act for significant social and ecological impacts, was successful in May 2021 (Australian Conservation Foundation Incorporated v Minister for the Environment 2021). However, despite bringing a total of ten legal challenges between 2014 and 2020 jointly against the Carmichael and adjoining Alpha coal mine and the expansion of the Abbott Point port related to these projects, environmental groups and farmers were not been able to stop the project from commencing or prevent its main environmental impacts¹⁸⁴. It reflects how environmental laws at both the state and federal level are structured to promote mining developments instead of being equipped to protect communities from various environmental risks and from climate change¹⁸⁵. Repeated legal actions have however delayed the project's timelines, established critical arguments such as the project's economic unviability, and countered false claims particularly around its jobs. The cases have also challenged the moral case justifying Australian

¹⁸⁴ Apart from the six environmental legal cases against the Carmichael coal project discussed in this section, local environmental groups also brought four challenges against the expansion of the Abbott Point coal terminal that risked harming the Great Barrier Reef. An explanation of these four cases can be found at <http://envlaw.com.au/carmichael-coal-mine-case/>.

¹⁸⁵ The Queensland Land Court that held extensive hearings on environmental and water related issues with the projects did not have the jurisdiction to overturn developments and could only make recommendations.

coal by making the case for inter-generational responsibility for protecting the Reef, jobs and future generations (Queensland EDO Solicitor interview 16/09/2017).

Outside the courts, a multi-pronged anti-coal movement including divestment campaigns and mobilisations and peaceful blockades at strategic sites was already underway by the time the Carmichael mine received environmental approvals. After the success of the divestment and 'Fight for the Reef' campaigns in arresting massive port expansions in Queensland as discussed in chapter 6, the question on the anti-coal movement's mind was 'should we say we have won?' (Tipping Point Campaigner (ex-350.org) interview 27/10/2017). However by 2016, subsidies and political championing by state and federal governments revived the economically unviable Carmichael project and forced a rethinking of strategies:

In 2016 we continued our overall strategy of divestment from fossil fuels, we were still not putting energy into organising an anti-Adani mobilisation. By the end of 2016 we started getting very scared, what if the NAIF funding came through, the W&J lost their case, and the mine went ahead? (Tipping Point Campaigner (ex-350.org) interview 27/10/2017).

Forty environmental and climate groups from the national, state and regional levels formally united under the banner 'Stop Adani' with the aim of stopping the Adani mine as a first step in moving Australia away from exporting coal. The Stop Adani website registered over 100 new local 'Stop Adani' groups within the first three months of its starting in March 2017 (www.stopadani.com.au). Stop Adani's ability to respond to rapid political changes on the Carmichael issue was owing to the flexibility of volunteer-driven local action groups and new engagement models that characterised the movement:

We threw an open invitation to self-start local action groups. They did the heavy lifting in a way big groups couldn't. We stopped Westpac during the week of action in April 2017; they immediately regrouped and went after Commonwealth. Local groups are the tip of the spear and can change really

quickly in a way big NGOs cannot. Volunteers have been getting on Skype every fortnight for updates and discussions. They show a detailed understanding of the company. They discuss how Adani might do it, get money, approvals, etc, and then decide what we can do. We built a 'Directed Network Campaign'; this model of engagement was used against the Tar Sands Keystone XL Pipeline. It is very relevant for Australia. We have four elements in our engagement strategy: a shared theory of change, a shared narrative, focus and discipline, and open grassroots approach and network. Campaign actions are not top down like it used to be with big NGOs who used to say 'come to a rally' (Sunrise Project Strategist interview 18/06/2018).

By mid-2017 red and white Stop Adani signs on black backgrounds had become prominent across inner city areas of the major metropolitan cities along the east coast – Melbourne, Sydney and Brisbane – where majority of the movement's supporters and volunteers lived. Town hall meetings were organised across the major metros to bring together the local arms of the Stop Adani movement. At one meeting in Sydney that I attended in September 2017, a packed hall of more than five hundred volunteers and activists cheered former Green Senator Dr Bob Brown as he vowed that Stop Adani would grow into the 'the largest movement that Australia has ever seen, bigger than the Franklin' (Meeting notes from 6/09/2017). The daylong session was dedicated to developing action strategies for local groups to pressure members of parliament.

At a Stop Adani protest in October 2017 in Sydney that I attended, paper mache heads of Prime Minister Turnbull and Gautam Adani were seen walking together holding a bag with 'Your Taxes A\$1 billion' written on it. The protest drew a couple of thousand supporters, and was part of Stop Adani's 'Big Day of Action', a coordinated day of sixty anti-Adani demonstrations across Australia. Images and drone footage compilations from the national anti-Adani day showed thousands of people gathered across a variety of landscapes – beaches and coral islands, urban parklands, farmers' paddocks and the red interiors of Australia – in 'Stop Adani' human signs (www.stopadani.com/actionday). Extensive social media broadcast, a

prominent logo, and professionally managed events like the Big Day of Action proved successful in reiterating and proliferating the movement's message.

The challenge of stopping the Carmichael project in the face of deep political support compelled ENGOs in the Stop Adani movement to cooperate at a level never attempted before:

Now we know that the only way we can do this is to make government stop it because Adani will not walk away. We have to shift the politics. Both sides are totally opposed to us. So our strategy was to put so much pressure that they have to relent. Everything we did, the government thought was impossible. They said we do not have power. We have never done things on this scale before; we have 40 NGOs on the phone every week. There are others doing things at the state level, also locally. This way of working has also helped big groups. We [Sunrise Project] act like the action engine room and other groups have found their niche in the network. The Australian Marine Conservation Society makes the links between coral deaths and coal, the Australian Conservation Foundation focuses on federal policies and threatened species. Australian Youth Climate Coalition and local groups do rapid responses and snap actions, Market forces and 350.org work on the financial strategies. GetUp is increasing its core capacity to reach voters on a mass scale (Sunrise Project Strategist interview 18/06/2018).

Between 2017 and 2018 Stop Adani built a national network that exerted political pressure in relevant constituencies, strategically aiming to shift the politics on the issue from the ground up. Through targeted mobilisations in Liberal Party electorates, Stop Adani and GetUp built up conflict within the Liberal Party on the issue. A particular case in point is the movement's mobilisation in Malcolm Turnbull's electorate of Wentworth in Sydney's eastern suburbs during the October 2018 by-election following his ousting as Prime Minister after a leadership challenge. The build-up to the polling day included weekly door-knocks and GetUp call-outs to 100,000 phone numbers in Wentworth (Tipping Point Campaigner (ex-350.org) interview 27/10/2017). Wentworth, a safe Liberal Party

seat since federation, was won by an Independent candidate with a climate commitment. Analysis by the Australia Institute (2018) indicates that the community campaign by Stop Adani played a role in causing a historic swing of votes away from the Liberal Party.

GetUp started offline community organising so as to exert electoral-level pressure more effectively on the issue of the Carmichael mine, using the tactic of a 'seat-by-seat anti-Adani Pledge for Members of Parliament', where supporters were asked to meet their local representative and hold them accountable on the issue (350 Australia CEO interview 10/10/2017). It continued using its online organising strategies to generate pressure during key moments for the Stop Adani movement:

When the federal government was going to give the A\$10 billion loan in 2016, GetUp used strategy and technology to hold mass conversations with voters to shift politics and change voters. They use a calling tool – they have phone numbers of at least half the voters in the electorate. And they have a script in the calling app (Sunrise Project Strategist interview 18/06/2018).

Stop Adani brought consistency to various tools and tactics that had become a regular feature of a growing anti-coal movement in Australia. It established an organising model driven largely by grassroots activism and local action groups, and built up a national-scale movement through it. It generated new groups that strengthened grassroots and local and constituency based mobilisations:

We had 100 registered Stop Adani groups, 65 of them were strong. The next question was 'how do we keep the momentum'? Tipping Point acts like an organising network. The raison d'être for Tipping Point was about understanding what is a grassroots model that can spread through the cities. It is a national project of the Friends of the Earth. The Stop Adani campaign seeded many constituency-based groups – Farmers for Climate Action, Divers for Reef Action. There's the Pacific Climate Warriors mobilising in the Western Sydney Suburbs.' (Tipping Point Campaigner (ex-350.org) interview 27/10/2017).

The 2000-strong membership of the Farmers for Climate Action (FFCA) joined the Stop Adani alliance in 2017 to collectively protest Queensland's allocation of free water licences to Adani (Slezak 2017b). They presented petitions against the water licence and the compulsory acquisition of farmland for the Adani rail project to all sitting members in the Queensland parliament (Kippen 2018) and called for a sustainable regional plan for Central Queensland that protected against the social and environmental impacts of massive coal projects (Smith 2018). An open letter from FFCA addressed to rural and regional members of federal parliament challenged the attack on renewable energy by the National Party, which is the regional conservative Party that represents farmers:

The motion against renewable energy carried at the recent Nationals federal conference and ongoing political opposition to a clean energy future demonstrates that the Australian Parliament is ignoring a core conservative constituency and your long-term supporters: those of us who feed and clothe Australia and the world (www.farmersforclimateaction.org.au).

Although the movement could not stop the Carmichael project, it made a national issue of the power of coal over Australian politics through exposing the nexus between Adani and state and federal governments:

Stop Adani galvanised people in a way that has surprised us. I am continually surprised at who has come out of the woodwork to support us. We had first told a larger story of needing to move away from coal by saying mining coal at Carmichael is harmful for the Reef and is responsible for coral bleaching – but the dots had not been joined. In a way this more direct message was more effective. The Adani project has become a symbol for coal, and we have won the narrative. And if we tell too broad a story we might win the war but lose the battle. (Sunrise Project Co-Director (ex-Greenpeace) Interview 20/10/2017).

Consequently, the words 'Stop Adani' became shorthand for civil society's demand to break Australian politics' affinity towards coal. Beginning with the climate, water and environmental impacts of the largest proposed coal mine in the Southern hemisphere, civil society's anti-Adani narrative grew in dimensions to reflect concerns about coal's deleterious effects on Australian democracy. The Stop Adani movement operated within two sharply contradictory realities in the post-Paris period: the global need for a rapid phase out of coal and the desperate politics of Australian governments to develop an entirely new coal region, despite a global withdrawal from coal. It served to delegitimise coal at various levels – the social, political, ecological and economic.

In summary, the public participation in anti-coal activism through Stop Adani's volunteers driven actions, the formation of new and niche activisms, political and climate advocacy by Central Queensland farmers, and the movement's multi-pronged strategies offer insights into how environmentalism's anti-coal politics shifted ground from its earlier thrust of 'saving the Reef to end coal' to directly confronting Australia's 'coal business' through making Carmichael Australia's most contested coal project.

7.4. Land rights politics of the Carmichael coal mine (2010–2018)

In 2004, the W&J traditional owners' Native Title Claim was registered over 30,000 square kilometres of land in the semi-arid Galilee Basin in Central Queensland under the *Native Title Act (Cth) 1993* (NTA). Native title registration gives claimants certain procedural rights in relation to activities such as grant of mining leases that has the potential to disrupt Indigenous law and culture by affecting the land and environment. Half a decade later, the Queensland government began implementing its vision to develop the Galilee Basin for coal. The W&J's claim area enfolded lands that came under Adani's coal tenements and mining leases after 2010. The horizontally integrated Carmichael rail, port and mine proposal crossed the traditional lands of four Aboriginal nations, the W&J, the coastal Juru, the Birriah and the Jangga people (West 2015).

Negotiations for consent for mining and an indigenous land use agreement (ILUA)¹⁸⁶ commenced in 2010 between Adani and a W&J 'Applicant' that officially represented the bigger Native Title Claim Group¹⁸⁷ in the negotiations. The W&J contended that Adani negotiated in bad faith during the stipulated six-month period by taking advantage of the coercive power of the native title system¹⁸⁸. They submitted to the UN Special Rapporteur on the Rights of Indigenous People that Adani used a 'divide-and-conquer' approach and mistreated Indigenous rights (Wangan and Jagalingou 2015, p. 18).

An ILUA was a pre-requisite for works associated with the project, and to secure a 2,750-hectare area of traditional land (referred to as the surrender area) over which native title would be removed for mining related infrastructure including an airstrip, workers village, and a washing plant (W&J 2018a). Without an ILUA the state government would be forced to extinguish native title and compulsorily acquire¹⁸⁹ the surrender area in order to issue mining leases (Robertson 2016). Without an ILUA Adani would be challenged to raise capital since most major banks comply with the Equator Principles for environmental and social risk management, and refuse to invest in projects without consent from Traditional

¹⁸⁶ Interactions between Adani and the W&J were bound by two processes in the Native Title Act. The first is the right to negotiate (RTN) process during which the proponent should negotiate in good faith with the affected Indigenous group to secure their agreement for the grant of a mining lease by the state (*Native Title Act 1993*, ss. 25,29,31). In case of failed negotiations after six-months, the company can refer the matter to the National Native Title Tribunal (NNTT) for a determination on whether a mining lease can be granted (*Native Title Act 1993*, ss. 35,38). The state has final discretion on whether to grant mining leases (or not) without Indigenous consent (W&J 2018a). The second involves an Indigenous Land Use Agreement (ILUA) through which the company secures the Indigenous group's agreement for mining leases as well as future acts that can impact their traditional lands (*Native Title Act 1993* ss. 24BA-24EC).

¹⁸⁷ The W&J native title Claim Group includes community members descended from the heads of the twelve different clans that together composed the W&J Traditional Owners at the time of British arrival. A Claim Group authorised the W&J 'Applicant', comprising of representatives from the twelve original families, to act on the W&J's behalf on native title claim matters under the NTA (W&J 2015).

¹⁸⁸ A W&J submitted to the National Native Title Tribunal that Adani provided only two weeks for an agreement on the proposed ILUA. Aiming to deter the W&J from bargaining for benefits, Adani threatened that the state would forcefully acquire the W&J's lands if they failed to agree on the ILUA offer within the short time period. Adani also refused requests for a life of mine service agreement to be included in the ILUA and attempted to undermine the W&J's opposition to the ILUA by sidestepping the Applicant who is the official representative, during negotiations (Arnautovic 2017).

¹⁸⁹ States gained the right to extinguish or impair native title in their jurisdictions through the 1998 amendments to the Native Title Act, particularly the right to compulsorily acquire native title land for private infrastructure (*Native Title Act 1993*, s. 24AMD(6B), arguably setting native title rights back by a decade.

Owners (O’Faircheallaigh 2011; Scambary 2013). It could also expose Adani to the financial risk of compensation claims from native title groups in the future. Adani was able to secure ILUAs with other traditional owner groups along the rail and port corridor (West 2015). However, in the case of the W&J, the ILUA was both strongly contested and created deep internal conflicts.

The W&J Family Council, a representative body that decides on all matters outside native title claim, refused consent for the Adani mine, becoming the first native title group to say an outright no to mining (Lyons et al. 2017a). Their discontent was noted as having been driven by the inadequacy of benefits and jobs proposed in the ILUA and the company’s disrespectful and non-transparent dealings¹⁹⁰. Independent analysis showed that the Adani deal was one of the worst for Traditional Owners (Meaton 2017) with compensations less than half the industry average (Quiggin 2017; Robertson 2017f). Three quarters of the stated economic benefits was contingent on jobs, raising concerns about the agreement’s feasibility given the negative outlook for coal’s future and Adani’s exaggerated jobs claim. The ILUA was struck down on three separate occasions¹⁹¹ at bona fide meetings of the W&J Native Title Claim group (Lyons et al. 2017a).

Adani brought proceedings before the National Native Title Tribunal after each of the two rounds of failed negotiations in 2013 and 2015. Both times, the Tribunal ruled that the State Government could grant mining leases under the NTA¹⁹² (W&J

¹⁹⁰ Criticisms of the first ILUA included the mining company failing to explain its details, not allowing independent analysis of the mining deal’s benefits and costs, and being unable to identify the area that would be subject to native title (Lyons 2019a). A second ILUA authorised at a contested meeting in April 2016 offered a significantly reduced upfront payment to the W&J. The W&J stated the company’s inability to provide transparent and honest information about the project’s impacts as a challenge in providing informed consent on their part. The W&J did not trust government regulation to protect their natural and cultural values, and to maintain their country as a ‘vital cultural landscape’ as required by Indigenous law, in the face of mining’s deleterious effects (Burragubba 2018).

¹⁹¹ The first ILUA was voted down at an authorisation meeting with Adani representatives in 2012. Adani’s revised ILUA was struck down in October 2014 based on a decision of an authorised W&J Native Title Claim Group meeting. A third ‘self-determined’ meeting of Traditional Owners in March 2016 held without the company’s involvement also rejected the ILUA (Lyons 2019a). A fourth meeting in 2017 completely rejected any mining agreement with Adani (Wagner 2017).

¹⁹² The first negotiations between the W&J and Adani occurred between November 2011 and November 2012, and failing an agreement, Adani approached the NNTT for a determination (Adani v. Jessie Diver and Ors. 2013). The second round of negotiations between the W&J and Adani for two mining leases lasted from October 2013 to October 2014 when the W&J Claim Group meeting

2015). Queensland issued all the mining leases to Adani regardless of the W&J's lack of consent (Australian Associated Press 2016). The mining leases and the Tribunal's determinations were based on what the W&J Family Council called a 'sham agreement' and a 'fake meeting to manufacture consent' (Lyons 2017b). The Carmichael project's political prospects became increasingly favourable by 2014 with federal approval and the Queensland Coordinator General's green signal, even before the conclusion of second negotiations between Adani and the W&J. The pressure to settle an agreement or risk native title being extinguished without receiving any benefits split the W&J Applicant and caused deep divisions among W&J native titleholders¹⁹³.

The W&J's experience of engagements with the native title regime during the negotiations revealed a constant prioritisation of mining and settler-state agendas over meaningful consent for Indigenous people (Lyons et al. 2017a; W&J 2018a). The conflict between the W&J people and Adani over the indigenous land use agreement with the involvement of the Queensland and Federal governments was shaped through complex institutional processes involving agencies and bodies under the Native Title Act¹⁹⁴. Such institutions are known to lack independence on account of being driven by state and corporate funding priorities¹⁹⁵. Interactions between mining companies, Indigenous groups and the state occurring within the

rejected the ILUA for the second time and Adani took proceedings to the Tribunal (Arnautovic 2017).

¹⁹³ The changing composition of the W&J Applicant reflected the divisive effect the mining company had on the W&J community through two rounds of failed negotiations (Brigg 2018). In 2014 a seven-member Applicant was replaced with a three-member group, which retained two older applicants and made a new appointment of Adrian Burragubba (W&J 2015). At an August 2015 Claim Group meeting, the three-member Applicant that had largely turned pro-mine was replaced with a 12-member Applicant comprised of a representative each from the 12 original W&J families. A Claim Group meeting in March 2016 further moved to replace four pro-Adani members from the 12 members Applicant, setting the stage for a long-drawn legal battle in Federal Court between pro-mine and anti-mine Applicants (W&J2015).

¹⁹⁴ The National Native Title Tribunal (NNTB) registers native title claims that are then heard in the Federal Court, facilitates negotiated determinations of native title, land use agreements, and future acts. Native Title Representative Bodies (NTRB) represent native title claimants and once native title has been legally determined, Prescribed Bodies Corporates (PBC) hold this title to perpetuity (Altman 2012a).

¹⁹⁵ The Native Title Tribunal has been known to interpret the NTA to benefit mining and rarely reject projects (Corbett and O'Faircheallaigh 2006). The state also tasks project proponents to fund negotiations for future acts under the Native Title Act with affected Indigenous groups, compromising the process and undermining the latter's bargaining power (Ritter 2009). Proponents hold the power to suspend funding for native title groups' legal representations (Arnautovic 2017) or pressure them to accept weak agreements (O'Faircheallaigh 2006).

structures of the NTA regime have been known to favour mining interests and capitalise on divisions within Indigenous groups (Bebbington et. al 2008; Corbett and O’Faircheallaigh 2006; Echo Hawk 2010; Lyons 2019a; Marsh 2013; O’Faircheallaigh 2007).

The W&J Family Council withdrew from the Tribunal proceedings in 2015 stating that:

We cannot afford to continue a case where we do not have the resources to put our objection to the Tribunal and the cards are already stacked against us...These proceedings and the legislation under which they are held do not advance our right to live in freedom, peace and security as distinct peoples with our own cultural values...While the legal system might weigh against us – when we say No, we mean No! (Burrabungba 2015, para 21).

After walking out of the NNTT, the W&J Family Council mounted legal challenges and a public and international appeal for their right to free, prior and informed consent under the United Nations Declaration of the Rights of Indigenous Peoples under the campaign slogan ‘Adani, No Means No’ (W&J 2015). The campaign started with the W&J Family Council presenting a ‘Declaration of Defence of Country’ to the Queensland government, urging against compulsory acquisition without consent (Borschmann 2015). Although Adani’s ‘bad faith’ negotiations had triggered their resolution to fight, owing to the historic, legal and political contexts of Indigenous rights and mining conflict, the focus of their resistance became a challenge to Australia’s native title system:

We have mounted a significant legal and political challenge to the system that enables governments and corporations to override our rights. We are taking on the racist legacy of native title and its failure to measure up to international laws that declare the rights of Indigenous people. We have sent a complaint through the UN Rapporteur on Indigenous Rights complaining about what they are doing to Indigenous people in this country (Burrabungba 2016, para 12).

During a visit to Australia in September 2016 the UN Special Rapporteur Human Rights Defender singled out the case of the Carmichael coal mine as an example of poor Indigenous consultation (Lyons et al. 2017a). The Rapporteur's assessment, detailed in the *End of Mission Statement* noted that:

Many Indigenous human rights defenders still experience severe disadvantages compared with non-Indigenous defenders. They are marginalised and unsupported by state and territory governments. This situation is compounded by the tendency of the central government to use the federal system as limitation on its ability to exercise responsibility for supporting Indigenous rights defenders. Furthermore, the right to free, prior and informed consent is not protected under Australian law, and government officials frequently fail to meaningfully consult and cooperate with Indigenous and community leaders. Indigenous rights defenders also face lack of cooperation or severe pressure from the mining industry with regard to project activities, as has been exemplified in the case of the proposed Carmichael Coal Mine in central-western Queensland. (Frost 2016, para 7).

The United Nations also intervened through the Committee for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination, asking Australia to consider suspending the Carmichael project until Adani secured consent from all representative W&J claimants. Based on a submission by the W&J, the international body noted that since ILUA consultations had not been conducted in the spirit of the FPIC principles enshrined under the UNDRIP, allowing the project to proceed would violate Australia's international obligations (Robertson 2019a).

However, repeated interventions from the United Nations and questions about the project's financial viability could not stop the state from paving the way for the Carmichael mine without Indigenous consent. The Australian state is considered the main driver of the Indigenous land grab behind the Carmichael coal mine (see Lyons 2017a; Lyons 2019a; Lyons et al. 2017a). The following four subsections account for how political, parliamentary and institutional processes were used by

the state to favour the Carmichael project over the free and prior informed consent of the W&J, and the significance of their in this hostile context.

7.4.1. State and Adani manufacturing consent (2016–2017)

The state laid the grounds for manufacturing the W&J's consent for the Carmichael mine through a meeting in January 2016 of some W&J Applicants who were willing to negotiate¹⁹⁶ with Queensland's Coordinator-General:

The way I understand the meeting was: take the deal or we'll extinguish Native Title. He was very careful how he said it and he didn't say it in that way, but that's the way I took it – (Craig Dallen, W&J Applicant member, quoted in Carey 2019, para 4).

Following this, Adani organised a meeting of the W&J community in April 2016 that the five Applicant group members opposed to the mine and their extended families boycotted (Carey 2019). The company claimed that the meeting achieved unanimous agreement from traditional owners, with 294 attendees having voted for and only one against the Carmichael mine (Sydney Morning Herald 2016). This contrasted with the outcomes against the mine determined in three previous meetings and one subsequent meeting (Wagner 2017).

Instead of being held on the W&J's traditional lands¹⁹⁷ the meeting was conducted in the coastal town Maryborough, where it was allegedly easier to 'rent-a-crowd' from the big Aboriginal communities in Cherbourg and Woorabinda. The company also paid for transport and accommodation for 341 attendees, a figure that was a hundred more than the size of any previous W&J meeting (Carey 2019). The meeting had been effectively stacked with attendees who did not have the right to

¹⁹⁶ Adani managed to split the new twelve-member W&J Applicant by then, and publicised the seven pro-mine applicants as 'rightful' Traditional Owners through its promotional materials, while undermining the five anti-mine Traditional Owners (Lyons 2017b).

¹⁹⁷ Traditional Owner requests to host the meeting on W&J country were vetoed by the company (Carey 2019).

vote or authorise the Adani ILUA¹⁹⁸ (Brigg 2018; Carey 2019; Wagner 2017). Although mining companies customarily meet all meeting expenses, the process also allows the corporations to offers inducements¹⁹⁹ and consequently have an impact on meeting outcomes:

You know, you come down, you get paid and why not? You get a free trip down. You get a motel, and then you go to a meeting. You get fed and then you get paid. If you're broke and you've got nothing, I'd jump into a bus too' (Craig Dallen, W&J Applicant member, quoted in Carey 2019, para 5).

This process raised questions about the validity of the ILUA certification and exposed the lack of independence of the regional Native Title Representative Body, the Queensland South Native Title Services (QSNTS), which receives most of its funding from the Federal Government. The QSNTS had helped to organise the April 2016 meeting and certified the meeting process and ILUA, despite its striking anomalies, in return for a payment of A\$30,000 from Adani (Brigg 2018). Adani's effort to manufacture consent for the ILUA was undermined when one of the seven individuals withdrew support at a later stage. This made it impossible for Adani to claim a majority support of the W&J Applicant (Robertson 2017c). Even pro-mine Applicants had flagged the misleading nature of the ILUA meeting²⁰⁰. Despite these contentions, and despite a clear lack of majority support, the NNTT still accepted Adani's application and registered the ILUA in December 2017 (W&J 2018b).

¹⁹⁸ An analysis of the attendance register entries for the meeting by the W&J Family Council's lawyers revealed that 60% attendees had never attended a W&J Claim Group meeting before and could not be found in the members' database maintained over 12 years of the W&J's Native Title Claim (Brigg 2018). Another violation was revealed through 71 of the 341 registered attendees not recording any 'Apical Ancestors' (family members connected to Country from whom Traditional Owners traced descent, a fundamental requirement for claims under the Native Title Act) on registration forms (Carey 2019).

¹⁹⁹ Thousands of dollars were paid to each of the seven individual applicants to recruit pro-mine attendees to the meeting, and the lawyer representing the seven was paid to engineer the ILUA (Lyons 2017b). A controversial tweet sent out by a Traditional Owner from the floor of the meeting urging 'only come meeting for money' encapsulated the concerns over the meeting process (Carey 2019)

²⁰⁰ The seventh Applicant who withdrew support expressed concerns about the 'pitiful nature of the agreement' and wishing Adani would renegotiate with his people (Dallen interview in Carey 2019).

7.4.2. McGlade decision and federal native title politics (2017)

In February 2017, the McGlade decision delivered by the Western Australian Federal Court in relation to the indigenous land use agreement of the Noongar People²⁰¹ determined that the signed consent of all members of the Applicant group was required for an agreement to be valid for registration under the native title act (McHugh 2017). The McGlade decision came a week before a due decision by the Queensland Federal Court on the W&J's legal challenge to invalidate Adani's contested ILUA. The W&J's lawyers appealed to the Federal Court to 'strike out' Adani's claim to the ILUA's authenticity based on the McGlade ruling (W&J 2017a). However, any legal action against the disputed ILUA was withheld owing to an urgent intervention by Australia's Attorney General into the Federal Court's hearing of the W&J's appeal for a 'strike out' (W&J 2017f). The federal government also proceeded to immediately amend the Native Title Act to overturn the McGlade decision in a manner described as 'completely disrespectful' to Aboriginal people (SBS 2017).

In any event, the McGlade decision sparked a backlash from the mining sector – as it had done after the 1996 Wik Decision – with the CEO of the Queensland Resources Council warning that it threatened 126 mining projects associated with ILUAs across Australia (Parliament of Australia 2017). The federal government introduced a bill in parliament within two weeks, explaining that 'urgent amendments are imperative to preserve the operation of currently registered ILUAs and provide the sector with a prospective process for registering ILUAs which minimises the risks presented by the McGlade decision' (www.seedmob.org.au/legal_briefing para 24). A rushed Senate Inquiry on the amendment bill allowed only two weeks for consultations with Indigenous groups and recommended that the bill be passed with minor amendments (McGlade 2018).

²⁰¹ The McGlade decision was given in an ILUA case for the Noongar people of WA, who (like the W&J) were claimants not yet granted Native Title (see McGlade v Native Title Registrar & Ors 2017)

The W&J submission to the Senate Inquiry highlighted that Australia violated international law by not following due consultation process with Indigenous groups on matters that would affect them (W&J 2017d). The 'No Means No' campaign mobilised 6500 supporters to write letters to federal politicians on the rushed amendments (Lyons et al. 2017a). The W&J were able to influence independent Senators and secure the support of the Greens to delay²⁰² the amendment bill by four months (W&J 2017e). Although the Labor opposition objected to the rushed consultations, it agreed with the spirit of the amendment bill (Hutchens 2017), reflecting a bipartisan consensus on the need to override native title considerations for mining interests (W&J 2017b). The *Native Title Amendment (Indigenous Land Use Agreements) Act 2017* came into effect once the bill passed the Senate in June 2017 (W&J 2017g).

The Adani mine was at the centre of this further delimitation of Native Title rights. Prime Minister Turnbull is reported to have delivered assurances of 'fixing native title uncertainty' to the Adani Group's CEO during a state visit to New Delhi in 2017 (Coorey 2017). On its part, Adani 'harassed the Native Title Tribunal to breach jurisdiction and register the ILUA even as the parliamentary amendment to McGlade was ongoing, writing five letters telling the Tribunal to 'do your duty'' (W&J youth spokesperson interview 20/10/2017). It was widely regarded that the government moved on native title in this precise manner to clear the way for the Carmichael project (Coorey 2017), with the Chair of the Senate Committee in federal parliament even referring to it as the 'Adani Bill' (W&J 2017g).

7.4.3. Failure of the legal defence against mining (2015–2018)

The W&J collectively challenged the Queensland Government, the native title institution and Adani, through a multipronged legal campaign that aimed to legally establish the case that by not allowing a veto, Australia's Native Title Act fell short of complying with the UN Declaration (Lyons et al. 2017a). Their endeavour to raise questions about human rights and principles of justice in Australia's legal

²⁰² Opposition to the government's mistreatment of Indigenous rights through the inadequate consultation process stalled two attempts to pass the amendment bill through the senate (W&J 2017e).

system and native title attracted strong support through pro-bono legal representations from senior counsels and barristers (see Coyne interview in Robertson 2016) The defeat of their long drawn-out legal campaign demonstrates the inherent structural bias of the judicial and native title institutions in prioritising mining and state agendas over Indigenous rights.

There were further legal challenges. In May 2015 the W&J appealed in the Queensland Federal Court against the Native Title Tribunal's determination that mining leases could be granted, submitting that the Tribunal had been misled by Adani's fraudulent conduct in withholding expert-evidence on actual jobs figures and overstating the project's economic benefits (Robertson 2016). The Court upheld the Tribunal's decision. A subsequent escalation of the challenge by the W&J before a full bench of the Federal Court was also rejected (W&J 2017c).

In April 2016, the W&J appealed to the Supreme Court for a judicial review of the state's capacity to issue the mining leases, stating that the Minister of Mines had not respected their right to 'natural justice' as per common law in issuing Adani's leases without a valid ILUA (W&J 2016b). The appeals were rejected on account of their 'narrow legal grounds'. A subsequent escalation of the appeal before the Court of Appeal in the Supreme Court was also rejected, with the judge clarifying that the state was not required by law to consult native titleholders before issuing mining leases, even when the ILUA's legal validity was undetermined (Burrage and Ors v Minister for Natural Resources & Anor 2017).

In December 2016 the W&J Family Council challenged Adani's 'sham' agreement from the contested April 2016 meeting, alleging that a majority vote was obtained from a 'rent a crowd' gathering of Indigenous persons who had never before identified as W&J people (W&J 2016a). The federal government's intervention after McGlade delayed the Federal Court hearing for the case till March 2018. In December 2017, the W&J filed an injunction in the Federal Court to restrain Queensland from extinguishing native title, appealing that the state should not take this unprecedented step for a project in financial uncertainty (W&J 2017i). The court decision on the 'sham agreement' case in mid-2018 once again ruled

against the W&J, putting the risk of native title extinguishment back on the table (Robertson and Sigato 2018).

The W&J moved for a Federal Court full bench appeal of the decision in September 2018 (W&J 2018a). Internal pressure within the Queensland Labor Party is reported to have prevented imminent native title extinguishment till the company could prove the project's financial reliability (Robertson 2018c). The W&J were ordered to pay security money for massive cost orders tallied up by Adani's lawyers²⁰³ against them from failed legal challenges (Archibald-Binge 2018). Adani's retaliation to the W&J set a precedent as the first time an Australian traditional owner was made bankrupt by a mining company, and its severity was noted by the Federal Court (Gregoire 2019). Although the W&J were able to temporarily salvage their last legal defence against Carmichael through public donations²⁰⁴, their appeal was finally overturned in July 2019 as Queensland removed the final roadblocks for the project's commencement (W&J 2019a).

7.4.4. 'Adani, No Means No!': The politics of withholding consent

By rejecting the ILUA, withdrawing from the NNTT proceedings, and saying no to negotiating with Adani, the W&J had posed an unprecedented test for Australian native title (Borschmann 2015). The impulse for the W&J's campaign stemmed from the NTA's denial of the right to veto and consequently Free Prior and Informed Consent (FPIC) for developments on traditional lands (Howard-Wagner and Maguire 2010, O'Faircheallaigh 2016). The campaign narrative asserted Indigenous sovereignty against the backdrop of forced colonial dispossession and its perpetuation through today's legal and political systems that denied them the fundamental right to consent:

²⁰³ By the end of 2018 Adani Australia's lawyers had tallied up cost orders against the W&J from court proceedings to the tune of A\$870,000 AUD. The company asked the Federal Court to direct W&J to pay A\$160,000 AUD in security money within a fortnight, failing which the W&J's appeal 'be dismissed with costs' (Robertson 2018d). The court found Adani's estimate to be 'disproportionate, and revised the W&J's security money to A\$50,000 (Archibald-Binge 2018).

²⁰⁴ They received funding from Grata Fund, a public interest litigation group (Grata Fund 2019).

The confrontation over the Galilee is the distillation of our peoples' struggle with the land grabbing and colonisation that has continued since day one of the British assertion of sovereignty over our lands and peoples – an assertion that we never ceded to and one that proceeds every day, still without our consent...We did not consent, we have not consented, we will never consent to the destruction of our country for Adani's Carmichael coal mine, or any others, on our ancestral lands. It would be against our law and order...So, we fight...We fight for our rights to free, prior, informed consent; to our own economic development; and to protection of our country and culture (Burrage 2018, p. x).

International human rights jurists agree that extractive projects on Indigenous lands should not proceed without the affirmative consent of Indigenous peoples whose survival, rights or traditional lands can be significantly and directly harmed (Lyons et al. 2017a). The W&J appealed to the United Nations to intervene on the issue of the Adani mine proceeding without Indigenous consent (Austin 2015). Their submission to the UN highlighted Australia's failure to fulfil its international obligation of protecting Indigenous rights:

Our ancestral homelands in central-western Queensland, Australia, are threatened with devastation by the proposed development by a private company, Adani Mining, of the massive Carmichael Coal Mine...We exist as people of our land and waters, and all things on and in them – plants and animals – have special meaning to us and tell us who we are. Our land and waters are our culture and our identity. If they are destroyed, we will become nothing...we have not consented to the development of the Carmichael mine or any other proposed mine on our traditional lands (W&J 2015, para 4).

The W&J also appealed to international financial institutions to stop funding the Carmichael project, during a world tour in 2015 (Market Forces 2015). The W&J youth spokesperson Murrawah Johnson talked about the 'tremendous task that it is in Australia and Queensland to take on a mining corporation when the laws are

stacked against us' (see www.adaninomeansno.com). She described the purpose of the tour of the international banks in May 2015 as:

They never hear our voices or know we exist, but the decision they make halfway across the world mean everything to us. We went around the world in 18 days', met seven banks, and directly presented our concerns as Indigenous people. (W&J youth spokesperson interview 20/10/2017)

By the time of the W&J's world tour of international financial institutions, 11 international banks including HSBC and Barclays had already committed to not funding Australia's largest proposed mine on grounds of respecting Indigenous rights, repeated delays in starting the project, and the effects on the Reef (Guardian 2015). During the two and a half weeks intensive tour, the W&J met investors and banks in London, Zurich, New York and Hong Kong (Market Forces 2015). The London-based Standard Chartered that had previously lent to Adani eventually ended its association with Carmichael, reportedly to avoid reputational damage that the distancing of other global banks from the project had exposed it to (Rankin 2015). Following a lobbying visit to Seoul in 2018, the W&J received written commitments from South Korean banks that had been in talks with Adani to not fund the Carmichael project (Talukdar 2019a).

The amendments overturning the McGlade decision and the unfavourable rulings in all legal challenges left political and legal pathways to resistance exhausted and the struggle moved into a more symbolic phase. In July 2017 the W&J held a significant 'Gathering on Country' near Clermont in July 2017 as an expression of their claim to ancestral lands and waters. It was the first on-country gathering of representatives from all families since forced removals started occurring in the late 1800s (Lyons et al 2017b). It was repeated in August 2019 in anticipation of native title extinguishment (W&J 2019b) and to publically demonstrate that 'our conflict is with the state' (W&J youth spokesperson quoted in Krien 2019b).

Despite taking a circuitous and politically circumspect path, Queensland ultimately took the unprecedented step of extinguishing W&J native title over the 1385

hectares 'surrender area' of the Carmichael mine, making it the first case of explicitly privileging private mining interests over Traditional owners (see Lyons et al. 2017a). No Means No could not stop the state from allowing the Carmichael mine to proceed without the W&J's consent. However, the campaign gained recognition as a leading Indigenous rights struggle, posing a challenge to the mainstream notion of development for Indigenous people through compliance to mining (Brigg et al. 2017). The W&J's unwavering resistance exposed the limitations of Australia's native title institutions (Lyons 2019a).

7.5. Analysis: Radicalising coal mining through various scales of contestations

The emergence of diverse discontents over coalmining under climate change and during the resource boom challenged the dominant narratives of economic prosperity associated with the Australian coal sector. Coal regions such as the Hunter Valley were reimagined as the 'Carbon valley' on account of the scale of transformation wrought by the minerals boom. Climate change has emerged as a transformative discourse for communities affected by intensive coal mining (Connor et al. 2009), and reflexively, coal has become the embodiment of Australia's concern for climate change (Duus 2013).

Simultaneously, social accounts such as Munro's depiction of intensive coalmining as invasion on country (Munro 2012) demonstrate a reflexive understanding of the coal boom as expressing domination by settler society, one that extends solidarity to historical Indigenous experiences of environmental loss through colonial dispossession. Anti-coal narratives during the minerals boom therefore assumed both historical and global dimensions, creating an inclusive and multi-scalar significance for resisting coal extraction. These multi-layered mobilisations against the effects of massive coal projects united various anti-coal constituents across cities and rural regions (Connor et al., 2009).

Against growing social discontent and changing global outlook for coal, the actions of governments to develop the Galilee Basin demonstrated the effects of the

resource curse in Australian politics. The efforts of state and coal corporations to champion coal, including through coal advertisements on television, indicated that coal was losing its social licence (Federal Greens Senator Waters, notes from Brisbane Stop Adani session 29/092017). The nexus between the state and the coal sector sustained optimism for coal's outlook and false narratives about coal's economic significance. Pro-coal narratives around its 'life saving potential' for the Southern poor indicated a concerted effort to legitimise the fossil fuel. It also rendered the narratives of the Australian governments indistinguishable from the public relations campaigns of large coal corporations.

Political attempts to legitimise the Carmichael project despite its weakening economic viability and growing social discontent over coal have served to expose coal's power over Australian politics (Dennis 2018). Significantly, the political influence of the resources sector was critical in enabling the project to be rescued. This has important implications for Australian democracy.

The inability of the Stop Adani movement to stop the Carmichael project, despite causing major disruption through legal, financial and grassroots political activism, has exposed the coal sector's power at various levels of politics and governance. Stop Adani's narratives and actions acquired newer layers of significance over time, from being a political discourse of anti-coal activism based on environmental and climate concerns, to becoming a critical test for democracy in the face of the capture of Australian politics by mining corporations with 'deep pockets' (Federal Greens Senator Waters, notes from Brisbane Stop Adani session 29/092017). In this context the key aim and focus for the new environmentalism is to expose and shift the capture of democratic institutions by the fossil fuel sector.

In part this has encouraged the formation of a more distributed model of grassroots disruption in the Stop Adani movement, linked to an active national network of local anti-coal groups. It has also seen the rise of a disaffected constituency of farmers in Central Queensland who have opposed both the free allocation of water to the Galilee basin coal mines and the governments' lack of climate action. This demonstrates a leap forward from the political imperatives of

the earlier Lock the Gate network. Lock the Gate had remained ambiguous on climate change, considering it an issue that 'greenies' would deal with (Friends of the Earth Campaign (FOE) Coordinator Interview 20/11/2017). However the Central Queensland farmers who have simultaneously experienced political marginalisation and climate impacts through severe droughts, have contested coal directly for its climate impacts.

The historical significance of the W&J's campaign as survivors of colonial dispossession who are now resisting extraction on their lands, and its formation through a dialectical process posing legal challenges and claims, has made the land-rights politics of the Adani mine a distinct albeit critically significant part of the social and political conflict over the Carmichael project. Returning lands through native title and state-based land rights is meant to redress Indigenous dispossession that resulted from Australia's colonial project to secure territory and resources (Crook and Short 2014; Echo Hawk 2010). However, the native title apparatus has favoured mining interests over the informed consent and self-determination of Indigenous groups (Coyne 2017).

The W&J have consequently experienced a reconfiguration instead of a disappearance of the settler-colonial state (Lyons 2019a). Their movement challenged the highly asymmetrical power relations between the mining resources sector, the state, and Indigenous rights within the coercive native title regime (Lyons 2019a). No means No particularly helped to examine relations between the settler colonial state and Indigenous people in the context of Australia's continuing attachment to coal.

The collective resistance to the Carmichael coalmine exposed coal's power across political institutions at various scales. The Stop Adani movement operated within two sharply contradictory realities in the post-Paris period – the global need for a rapid phase-out of coal and the desperate politics of Australian governments to develop an entirely new coal region. The farmers operated within the political reality of increasing marginalisation and a growing threat to their livelihoods in part due to increased coalmining and climate change. The W&J's politicisation of

the issue of Indigenous consent was based on a direct experience of institutional coercion that has only affirmed and compounded historical colonial dispossession. These various grounds for resistance exposed how coal exerts power over Australian politics and institutions – and how it can be resisted.

The collective resistance politicised the contradictions of coal in Australia. The anti-coal narratives that emerged from the Hunter Valley and Liverpool Plains and through alliances of environmental groups with farmers and Indigenous native title groups were extended in the resistance to the Adani mine. But other factors, such as explicit government alignment with a corporation with a disreputable environmental and financial record, while disregarding Indigenous consent and farmers' water concerns, generated greater public outrage, allowing anti-Adani movements to mobilise on a broader platform of public concern against coalmining. The Adani mine became synonymous with climate change and the power of the coal industry in the public imagination.

7.6. Conclusion

The collective resistance of the Stop Adani movement, the opposition of farmers from Central Queensland, and the Wangan and Jagalingou traditional owners offer insights into the political and economic context of coal in Australia. This context demonstrates the effects of resource curse on politics and the nexus of the coal sector and the state, where the state promotes and subsidises massive coal extraction projects even though they risk becoming stranded assets owing to a global decline in coal demand. In this context, states favour the short-term private interests of coal companies over the concerns of affected community stakeholders.

Operating within the political and economic context of coal in Australia in the post-Paris era, it became imperative for environmental activism to disrupt the power of coal over politics. The strategy, tactics and structures of the Stop Adani movement, the emergence of new and niche activism within the movement network, and the emphasis on a distributed network of grassroots activism reflects this shift. The activism of Central Queensland farmers indicated a new critical politics amongst a

politically conservative rural constituency. Apart from the immediate risks of coal mining to groundwater resources, it was shaped through the severe droughts that affected their livelihoods and their experience of exclusion given the clear influence of the coal sector.

Having experienced coercion within Australia's native title system, the imperative for the Wangan and Jagalingou's resistance became to expose Australia's failure to meet international Indigenous rights standards. Its campaign demonstrated how in its bid to promote coal, Australian governments failed their obligations to give Indigenous people free, prior and informed consent. Finally, climate change emerged as a transformative argument for various discontents against coal, and for a wider transformation in environmentalism itself.

Chapter 8

Resistances from coal's new frontier in the Galilee Basin in Central Queensland

8.1. Introduction

A national anti-coal environmental movement was consolidated from resistances across key sites of extraction during Australia's resource boom. It ranged from anti-coal contestations in the Hunter Valley and Liverpool plains, opposition to coal seam gas in New South Wales and Victoria, and a smaller extent in Southern Queensland, and opposition to coal-port developments on the Great Barrier Reef. The movement was shaped through various anti-coal socio-political dynamics related to these sites at the local, regional and national levels. In the Hunter the environment movement joined local and grassroots networks against coal while in the Liverpool Plains alliances were built between environmentalists, farmers and native titleholders. Conservative rural communities and farmers were radicalised through resisting coal seam gas extraction, and the deteriorating Reef became the symbol of Australia's climate destroying economic pathway of coal.

Compared to the previous resistances, challengers to the Galilee coal mines were faced with the spatial elements of a sparse geography and a dominant pro-coal rhetoric from Central Queensland. The Galilee Basin region is sparsely populated by rural towns and scattered properties of pastoralists and graziers. According to the 2011 census, an estimated 20,000 people live in the region, and agriculture is the main industry, employing one third of the population. Community activity is mostly concentrated around the main towns – Alpha, Jericho, Barcaldine, Aramac, Tambo, Blackall, Charleville, Richmond, Augathella and Hughenden – where 75% the region's residents live (Australian Bureau of Statistics 2013b). The closest large economic centres lie on the central coast, at Townsville to the northeast and

Mackay to the east. Mackay serves as a mining services town for the coal-producing Bowen and Surat Basins.

Australian governments have defended the logic of opening up the green field Galilee Basin for coalmining on account of its perceived insignificance owing to its remoteness. Greg Hunt, the federal environment minister in the Tony Abbott government, described the Carmichael project as a 'mining operation in the deep outback of Queensland...[in] one of the most remote areas...an enormous distance from any significant town' (cited in Sturmer 2014, para 5). Apart from ignoring climate change and environmental concerns around the region's unique biodiversity, this understanding disregards the sacredness of country and dreaming places for the Wangan and Jagalingou (W&J) people and the critical value of groundwater for farmers. Jolley and Richards (2020) argue that such an understanding demonstrates what Howlett and Lawrence (2019, p.1) describe as settler colonialism within mineral governance in Australia.

At the regional scale, a nexus of politics, the coal industry and the Newscorp media which enjoys primary readership in Central Queensland, promised that the Galilee Basin coal mines would be the 'next big thing' for the region. The economic benefits of the resource boom had been felt unevenly across Central Queensland. While some economic centres had prospered, others had been left behind. Mackay, previously a base for the state's sugar industry, had flourished during the mining boom with an expanded coal-export trade through the Hay Point Terminal south of the city. In contrast, Townsville had reeled from the closure of a nickel refinery owned by mining magnate Clive Palmer and faced a high rate of local unemployment. The Galilee coalmines were promised as the economic solution Townsville needed.

The pro-coal narrative constructed spatial identities in the national debate through representing the issue of the Carmichael mine as a cultural friction between Australia's north and south and as an urban-rural binary that is fundamental to the mainstream Australian identity (Jolley and Richards 2020). This construct was made possible in part through a dislike for southern influences, conservative

politics, and a rural populism characterised by a frontier ethos (Stuart 1985) that built up over time in Queensland owing to its developmental history (Duus 2015). It created a generic imaginary of an inner-city 'greenie' who is emotionally and spatially removed from the social and economic questions of Central Queensland, as the face of the anti-Adani opposition (Jolley and Richards 2020). It disregarded the class struggle implicit in farmers' discontent over coalmining, the historic grounds of the W&J's challenge, and concerns of local residents opposed to the Galilee mines.

With a focus on the politics of coal in relation to Central Queensland, this chapter analyses the tactics and pathways to resistance of the three socially and historically distinct anti-coal constituents – local environmental groups, farmers in the Galilee Basin, and the W&J traditional owners – who now face the common risk of coalmining. The background summarises the political economic history of the Galilee Basin from the beginning of White settlement and colonial dispossession of Indigenous people. It traces the changing power of pastoralists from the colonial period till present times.

Sections 8.3, 8.4 and 8.5 look at these three streams of mobilisations against the Carmichael project. For the environment movement, the local tactics of challenging coal in Central Queensland have been considered critical for challenging Australia's coal-exports at the grassroots level. For the farmers of the Basin, a sustained disaffection owing to state neglect has turned into a conflict over artesian water that has been put at risk by the Galilee mines. The W&J's campaign has focussed on the inadequacy of Australia's native title regime. They have forged international Indigenous solidarities and strategic Indigenous-green relations that have situated their story within a global context of fossil fuel extraction on Indigenous lands.

The analysis in Section 8.6 discusses how the three campaign streams built a matrix of opposition to coal mining that both grounded the issue of climate change within the local conflict as well as foregrounded it as an overarching concern for their disaffections. Section 8.7, the concluding section, highlights the significance of the collective resistance for Australia's new anti-coal environmentalism. The

fieldwork I conducted in Central Queensland a month before the 2017 state election offered an opportunity to observe the full extent of the social and political conflict over the Carmichael mine that had become a cardinal election issue in the Central Queensland region.

8.2. Background

Although coalmining occupies a dominant economic position in Central Queensland, it is new to the Galilee Basin, which lies towards the central-west of the broader region. The state's approach of deeming the Galilee Basin a suitable sacrifice zone for coal extraction ignores the region's political economic history. A historical perspective can offer insights on the significance of collective anti-coal opposition from disparate regional communities in the Galilee who share a conflicted past.

Queensland's history of frontier violence is considered the grimmest of all the Australian colonies. The scale of violence is partly attributable to the relatively short period of time in which Queensland was colonised and the simultaneous advance of the multiple frontiers of pastoral, mining, maritime and plantation on Indigenous country (Evans 2004). From the 1860s, the expansion of agriculture in the new colony was driven by settler society's ambitions to extend both Christianity and 'civilisation' to Aboriginal land (Evans 2007). Through a process of regional transformation that included extensive ecological changes resulting in disruption of Indigenous food and water sources, the pastoral industry removed Indigenous people from country within one generation in most cases (Duus 2015).

As a permanent and exhaustive water source in Australia's dry interiors, groundwater from the Great Artesian Basin held great significance for settler society and for pastoralism that was central to the Basin's economy. Artesian water was the first 'resource' to be 'discovered', utilised and valued in the area (Duus 2015). Often referred to as 'liquid gold', Queensland's first groundwater was 'extracted' at Barcaldine in 1887 (Hoch 1992, p. 29). Hundreds of flowing bores quickly followed in western Queensland and helped to secure water supplies for

the outback pastoral industry (ibid). The colonial government supported the expansion of pastoralism in the semi-arid central-west through funding explorations and the establishment of artesian bores (Duus 2015).

In the early years of White occupation economic output in the Galilee Basin was dominated by wool production for export. Apart from displacing the original people, the wool industry was also characterised by conflicts between the classes of pastoral workers, landholders and governments, leading to the prolonged Shearer's Strike in 1891 (Duus 2015; Svensen 2008). The power of pastoralists was built through a combination of preferential legislations and the dominance of pastoral interests in the colonial government. Starting with the *Regulating the Occupation of Unoccupied Crown Lands in the Unsettled Districts Act 1860*, Queensland's earliest land acts were designed to incentivise and facilitate the occupation of country by pastoralists (Duus 2015).

The livestock industry continued to change the ecology of the Galilee Basin through broad-scale vegetation clearing and planting of exotic grass for pasture. The state incentivised mechanised clearing after World War II through tax deductions; these measures increased the pace and scale of vegetation clearing (Wear 2010). Queensland had one of the highest land clearing rates in the world, and within the Galilee Basin, places such as Jericho Shire became the most extensively cleared sites, in pursuit of pasture for livestock (Cooper 2005). Land clearing is a source of historic conflict between environmentalists and graziers in Queensland. Queensland passed successive legislations to tackle land clearing from the 1990s; these measures were met with opposition from agricultural interests. Broad scale clearing was finally phased out through legislation passed in 2004 that aimed to harness the benefits of conservation values and reduce carbon emissions (Duus 2015).

In 1991, Queensland's Labor government passed Indigenous land rights legislation through the *Aboriginal Land Rights Act 1991*. It was regarded as a weak legislation enacted to ameliorate the racist legacy of the previous Joh Bjelke-Peterson government's Queensland Coastal Islands Declaratory Act 1984 which aimed to

block land claims by Torres Strait Islanders (Foley and Anderson 2017; Tatten and Djnnbah 1991). The state has however processed Indigenous claims to country and returned lands under the *National Native Title Act 1993* (NTA) since its inception. As per government records, over 26 years of the NTA, Queensland has resolved 148 native title claims and opposed fewer than one in 12 claims (Robertson 2019b). The W&J claim area is currently bounded by other native title holdings or claims such as the Jangga to the northeast, Barada Barna Kabalbara and Yetimarla to the west, Kangoulo to the southwest and the Bidjara people to the south (NNTT 2020).

Since the beginning of White settlement in the Galilee Basin, industry and trade have resulted in waves of social and ecological disruptions, with the initial period being characterised by one of Australia's grimmest frontier wars. For Indigenous communities, surviving colonial dispossession is an ongoing process that continues. Despite its restrictive scope, returning lands through the native title regime has begun to redress some historical injustices of colonial dispossession toward Indigenous peoples. Industry and trade have also been characterised by alliances between governments and private interests (Duus 2015). However for farmers who had historically enjoyed political power, the pre-eminence of coal exports in the Australian economy from the 1980s has resulted in a progressive marginalisation of their influence over governments²⁰⁵. The nexus of the state and coal mining companies now directly affects the interests of the agriculture sector.

In the twenty-first century, communities in Galilee Basin have encountered another wave of transformation through the prospect of massive coal mining projects. Even as climate change has posed risks to the region's primary agricultural sector through water insecurity and increased droughts (Queensland Government 2019), a high influx of foreign capital and record prices of Australia's resource-exports during the minerals boom have made it viable to develop the remote Galilee basin for coal.

²⁰⁵ The value of mineral exports has been greater than that of agricultural and cattle exports in the Queensland economy since 1982-83, with coal majorly contributing to this change (Queensland Government 2009).

8.3. Tactics of anti-coal environmentalism

The Fight for the Reef campaign had made Queensland's coal exports a national issue through highlighting the risk to the Reef from port expansions and exacerbation of climate change through increased burning of coal. The divestment arm of the anti-coal environmental movement made a significant dent to the economic prospects of coal port expansions and the Carmichael project. In addition, Labor's win in the 2015 state election made the anti-coal movement feel that 'a bit of heat was taken off the issue' of the Carmichael mine (Tipping Point Campaigner (ex-350.org) interview 27/10/2017). However, sustained and strong political support for the Adani project at both the state and federal levels meant that the earlier success of financial disruption alone could not stop the development of the Galilee Basin:

The Newman government had a lot of hubris. 2013-2014 was one of the worst times, with both Abbott and Queensland advocating coal, and cracking down on activists, a A\$300 million loan so Adani won't have to pay royalties for 5 years. No other coal mine has been given that. And then Labor won unexpectedly. But we soon realised that did not change things. [Premier] Palaszchuk does not want to be seen as anti-jobs like greenies. The government is working on the China Stone approval now while seeing Adani through; the idea is it will be ready to go when Adani starts (Mackay Conservation Group Coordinator interview 28/10/2017).

My interactions and interviews with volunteers and coordinators of Central Queensland-based groups and listening to campaign discussions over a one-week period at the Mackay Conservation Group's office revealed the structural nature of the challenge to resisting Adani in Central Queensland. For the Mackay Conservation Group, a peak ENGO in Central Queensland, the priority issues in its 30 years of operations had shifted from tackling land clearing and privatisation of National Parks to now finding themselves 'in the frontline of coal, a fight we did not choose to fight' (Mackay Conservation Group Coordinator interview

28/10/2017). Central Queensland was transformed through the expansion of coalmining in the Bowen Basin over 15 years of the resource boom, to become Australia's largest coal producing region. Owing to the scale of its transformation during the resource boom, the region's current political economic context posed strategic challenges to attempts by local and regional environmental groups to challenge the Carmichael coal mine:

The Bowen Basin has thick seams of coal, so plenty of coal to be extracted, 65% is coking coal and 35% thermal coal. Most of Queensland's coal comes from there. There's been mining in the Bowen Basin from the 1970s. Mackay is different from everyone else; it has gone from boom to bust. Ask anyone born in the 1980s; an entire generation has grown up with the boom. During the boom, mine jobs generated big incomes for Mackay, but ultimately they weren't sustainable. The bust came, and then the promise of Adani followed (Mackay Conservation Group Coordinator interview 28/10/2017).

The risk of the Galilee Basin's development became evident to Central Queensland groups when protected nature reserves began to be cleared for the first mega mines, long before the national movement became cognisant of the issue:

This all goes back to 2007 when Clive Palmer wanted to mine Bimblebox Reserve that had protected by Federal and state legislation. We went out to Bimblebox and spotted 146 threatened species. Then we did a survey of impacted wildlife for all the leased mine sites in Galilee – Palmer, Adani, Rhinehart (ex-Coordinator Mackay Conservation Group (MCG) interview 28/10/2017).

The extent of coal mining and a corresponding weakening of environmental regulations during Queensland's coal rush significantly affected the groups' ability to respond to environmental destructions:

In the 1970s we had strong regulation that followed on from the UN. The boom presented a very different picture for environmental regulation. During the boom you could have multiple Environment Impact Assessments dumped on communities with only 20 days to have a say. The size of projects used to be 1 to 8 million tonnes of coal (per annum), then during the boom it became 20 to 30 million, and then with the Galilee mines it became 60 million tonnes. That kind of increase in scale is unbelievable; it leaves communities without ability to cope. Groups are disempowered (ex-Coordinator Mackay Conservation Group (MCG) interview 28/10/2017).

The process of disempowerment of communities also involved significant funding cuts from ENGOS and Queensland's Environmental Defenders legal network. Funding cuts reduced the Mackay Conservation Group to a very small operation with only five full-time staff, and it had to rely on its committed group of volunteers. One of Stop Adani's first priorities in Queensland was to build the capacity of ENGOS and local community groups:

New South Wales and Victoria-based groups on coal seam gas had been there much longer. But groups in Queensland were weaker from last two decades. We spent blood, sweat, and money to build capacity with them. Providing capacity to the Queensland Environment Defenders Office was critically important. North Queensland Conservation Council and local groups mostly did legal actions and freedom of information work. Lock the Gate's main focus is on mine rehabilitation, so they will try to make sure Adani pays full compensation. And they also led the work on the water allocation issue. Farmers for Climate Action provided commentary on water and climate. The Mackay Conservation Group has long-term funding to provide legal and local support (Sunrise Project Strategist interview 18/06/2018).

Central Queensland groups like MCG felt the double pressure from facing both the hostility of local conservative politicians and a hostile press. The domination of the pro-coal narrative in the Murdoch-owned NewsCorp local newspapers amplified

the challenges of local activists and added to the polarising social effect on the Carmichael issue by prioritising the message about jobs from coal over other concerns surrounding the issue:

We are at a point where coal is seen as toxic. There is some sort of an upheaval. People want jobs but are still uncomfortable with Adani. People in Townsville are used to big men coming and saying they will save the world. And then things go bust! Townsville Bulletin makes the Adani mine seem like manna from heaven. It is Murdoch media, as is the Courier Mail, Cairns Post, Daily Mercury. We did a random survey of 220 residents in Mackay. 90% don't want Adani to get free water. Almost 50% don't want any new coal mines. You won't hear that in the media. The local media is pro-Adani. So now George Christensen our MP (federal member for Dawson on the coast of Central Queensland) is calling us anti-jobs, anti-coal terrorists, a threat to sovereignty! (Mackay Conservation Group Coordinator interview 28/10/2017).

The period between the Queensland elections of 2015 and 2017 was critical for the Stop Adani movement to build resistances in Central Queensland:

We thought of three things. The first was to go off after the banks again. We thought of reviving direct action to help the financial campaign. As Adani got ready to build the rail corridor FLAC prepared for direct action to show investors we are disrupting the project. We won against Westpac in the 'Week of Action in April 2017', and went after Commonwealth Bank. The second was to build local support in Bowen. We had to mitigate effects of possible crackdowns on our blockades near Abbott Point. The third was to build capacity in Queensland. The intention was to have thousands of people day after day to blockade (Tipping Point Campaigner (ex-350.org) interview 27/10/2017).

Front Line Action on Coal (FLAC) began peaceful blockading actions at Abbott Point and along Adani's rail corridor in 2017 (Gregoire 2019b). The grassroots

direct actions led to the idea of a permanent activist camp in the Galilee Basin. Binbee, a permanent anti-Adani base camp was set up by October 2017 at a location that is a 45 minutes drive from Bowen. Located on private land in the Birri Indigenous people's country through which Adani's rail corridor passes, Binbee, which means good in the Birri language, served as a learning space for peaceful civil disobedience and collective social disruption to address the climate emergency (Gregoire 2019b). The culture at Binbee included an acknowledgement of the long Indigenous history and its continuing presence on the land. Activists at Binbee assumed a practical approach towards local sustainability through growing a kitchen garden on the campground.

Organised by FLAC and other volunteer-based grassroots networks against coal such as Reef Defenders and the more recently formed Galilee Rising, Camp Binbee attracted volunteers from all around as well as outside Australia. Participants peacefully blockaded the port, rail corridor and Adani's mining activities, and were prepared to face arrests for doing so. The Camp also registered the presence of other grassroots civil disobedience activist networks including Extinction Rebellion and was seen by the collective as an organic template for social change at a time when politics could not be trusted to deliver climate justice (Daley 2019).

When the federal Labor opposition started to address the climate and financial risks around coal after the Paris agreement, it indicated a small albeit temporary shift in the political ground on the Carmichael coal mine between the two major parties. GetUp led a months-long electoral mobilisation on the Carmichael issue in the lead-up to the 2017 Queensland election. It combined offline organising along with the standard online mobilisation to achieve maximum impact by building electoral power:

They would organise a gathering of calling volunteers, to talk about what do you care about? And then they go and call. 130,000 calls went out in two weeks to voters in marginal seats in QLD during elections, half of them were by Stop Adani volunteers, the other half by GetUp coordinators (Sunrise Project Strategist interview 18/06/2018).

The earlier Fight for the Reef campaign had generated support from select groups of environmentally supportive communities along Queensland's central coast and from Reef Tourism operators. The campaign had played out in a highly politically conflicted social environment. The long existent tension between Queensland's coal and Reef dependent tourism industries could now be observed through the deepening social divide on the issue of the Carmichael mine between towns such as Bowen and Airlie Beach along the Central Queensland coast:

Arlie beach is the biggest jumping off point for the Reef on the Central Coast. We were badly affected by cyclone *Debbie*, we haven't had a storm like this before. Airlie beach knows what is going on with the Reef; they don't deny climate change. But inland in Bowen they do! It was initially planned as the capital of North Queensland, but then Townsville took over. They were the fruit bowl of Australia, and many including mayor made money off it. They had prawn trawling and meat works. Merinda meatworks closed, it was the main employment source. Fruit business suffered, people lost jobs, and the government took back fishing licences. So they put their faith in coal projects. Adani won Bowen over with a sausage sizzle. Bowen sees Airlie beach as fortunate wealthy greenies, and generally feel hard done up by (AMCS Coordinator Airlie Beach interview 30/10/2017).

All regional councils on the central coast – Mackay, Rockhampton and Whitsundays – and Townsville in North Queensland supported the project (Krien 2017). Central and North Queensland became the political battleground during the lead-up to the 2019 federal elections, with both federal political parties targeting the region's voters. Pro-coal politicians gathering to show their support for the Adani mine in the remote town of Clermont on W&J country (Lyons 2019b). On the other hand, Federal Labor, which appeared to have shifted its stance towards the Carmichael mine, if not towards coalmining per se, targeted marginal seats in coastal electorates with a plan to diversify the regional economy, appealing to blue-collar constituents to choose local infrastructure over the

financially unviable Carmichael project (Murphy 2018c). Mining magnate Clive Palmer's election intervention through polarising the electorate with an anti-Labor advertising campaign that he called a 'service to the nation' (Howells 2019), indicated the high moral ground coal enjoys in Central Queensland.

The resistance to Adani in Queensland did not dissipate after the mine officially commenced in September 2019. Grassroots disruption of the mine and rail construction assumed greater significance during this period. Camp Binbee started to grow in numbers after Queensland issued Adani's last approvals and extinguished the W&J's native title over the 'surrender area' (Krien 2019a). The Queensland government responded by stepping up police surveillance of protestors in anticipation of civil disobedience when the Adani mine commenced (Smee 2019a). It also criminalised protests through a new law banning activists from using 'locking devices'. 'Locking on' to machinery using these devices had become a common activist tactic at peaceful blockades of coal mine and rail construction. This move prompted the UN to warn that Australia fell short of international human rights obligations in relation to peaceful assembly (Smee 2019b).

8.4. Rural discontent over coal and Farmers for Climate Action

The idea that began with the 'Lock the Gate' initiative in the coal seam gas mining impacted farming regions of New South Wales and Victoria – farmers locking their gates to hydraulic fracturing on their properties – expanded in Central Queensland through farmers opposing Galilee coal mines to also include demands for climate action from governments. Several local farmers joined the new national alliance Farmers for Climate Action. Farmers in Central Queensland were fighting multiple threats from coalmining in the Galilee Basin that were a result of decades of a structural shift in government's priorities towards favouring mining corporations over the farming sector:

The Lake Eyre Basin Advisory Committee is fighting Queensland and Federal Governments on water issues. We are worried that 350 km long

and 50 km wide coal mines will be dug right on the main recharge zone of the GAB over the long-term. None of the coal mines in the Bowen Basin sit on recharge zone of GAB nor have free licences. It is a huge risk to water in the outback. Then they give free licences to Adani but not to farmers. Governments are batting for companies who are putting in the money, not for people. The government has become anti-people. Farmers are the community, mining companies are corporations; this is a direct clash of the interests of the Liberal National Party. This is a huge strike at Australia's sense of fair go (Longreach farmer interview 23/08/2017).

As in the case of Lock the Gate, environmental activists who operate under the title of organisers, working to knit together communities facing environmental risks, helped bring together previously unconnected landowners in Central Queensland under the umbrella of the Farmers for Climate Action, indicating another alliance forged amongst two traditionally hostile groups. While Lock the Gate avoided discussing the issue of climate change, FFCA unambiguously called for climate action:

Greenies have always pointed fingers at them and not understood them. I usually work with graziers. They always talk in generations. Farmers for Climate Action formed one year ago by farmers. Our focus is on projects that are climate killers and affect policy. It is an advocacy group for unsustainable land use. We are advocates for farmers' rights and for long-term sustainability for land use and groundwater. We are becoming a voice for the industry's sustainability. (Coordinator Farmers for Climate Action interview 30/10/2017).

The area surrounding the Carmichael mine, the electoral seat of Gregory, is considered a safe seat for the Liberal National Party. However the sense that the elected political representative does not represent the interests of farmers is acute amongst the small and scattered community, and was reflected in what a third-generation cattle farmer from Longreach told me:

We are formed from conservative voting populations. We have always been the core constituents of right wing politicians. And now new alliances are forging outside of politics (Longreach farmer interview 23/08/2017)

The transformation of Central Queensland through mining and the process of increasing marginalisation of farmers and farming's future viability in the region has become a key concern for the electorate:

Coalmining in Clermont used to be low key and part of landscape. It used to be agriculture with a little bit of mining, and now it seems like a lot of mining with little agriculture, and you wonder about the long-term sustainability. Increased automation only down to three people in a mine and you feel very vulnerable about job security. We are basically left without options in this region and governments just do not care about sustainability. We have some work to do at our end to work with Greenies; we need a cultural change to form alliances with them (Jericho farmer interview 1/11/2017).

This farmer's cattle property near Jericho, which I visited during my fieldtrip in Central Queensland, lies adjacent to GVK-Hancock's proposed Alpha coal mine. Alpha poses a direct water-risk to the property; his water bores dip into aquifers adjoining the Alpha's underground sources and risk being contaminated from coalmining. The farmer was part of the legal challenges to the Alpha and Kevin's Corner coal mines in the Land Court. Being unable to afford legal fees, he was forced to make his own legal representation on an issue critical to his livelihood. He was also part of the citizens' delegation to India that apprehended the Premier's entourage to Mundra in March 2017. Seeing the condition of local communities in Mundra left him shocked as to what Adani can do to people (Jericho farmer interview 1/11/2017). Having lost faith in the Liberal National Party, the lack of power amongst ordinary people to influence political decisions, and wanting a sustainable future for Central Queensland, he has run as an independent candidate for Gregory in successive state elections:

Alpha case, where we won, mining companies did not acknowledge that landholders are a legitimate voice. They always tell the story of greenies stopping investment and stopping jobs. The companies refuse to put all the problems into the make good agreements, and they ask you to sign a confidentiality agreement, signing a make good agreement. We need an independent voice. They all ignore you when they get into power. One of things that happened since we started at this property in 2001 – they are weakening the right of people to object to mines unless the mine is on your property. Newman changed legislation later to give statutory water licence to mining corporations. Core issue for my election campaign is transparency and accountability of government. Coal is a classic example for these problems (Jericho farmer interview 1/11/2017).

As one its first politically focussed activities since formation, Farmers for Climate Action brought all the candidates for the seat of Gregory together for a forum before the Queensland elections in November 2017 (Slezak 2017d). Attended by all candidates contesting the seat of Gregory, including those of the One Nation, Green and Labor Parties and the sitting LNP member, the forum debated the issues of mining impacts, water and climate change for the region. During my drive from Rockhampton to Jericho along with the Farmer's for Climate Action Coordinator who was preparing the forum, we stopped at several properties encouraging farmers to attend the forum. Strong political disaffection was evident through farmers talking about having voted for the populist 'One Nation Party' as a protest response during the 2015 state election.

Farmers from Central Queensland joined environmental groups to protest the impacts of the Adani mine on water through a regional road show titled 'Our lifeblood, our water' in April 2018 (www.lockthegate.org.au/watermackay). They became a vocal constituency for climate action in the wake of a severe drought and criticised the federal coalition government's failure to develop a long-term climate response (Cox 2018).

8.5. 'We meet at the crossroad': Wangan and Jagalingou's alliances

Conflict over fossil fuel extraction on Indigenous lands has emerged as a critical intersectional justice issue in the present era. Indigenous groups have found themselves both at frontline of climate impacts and of fighting fossil fuel projects. While the tactics and strategies of environmental activists and farmers' mobilisations in Central Queensland were shaped in response to coal's regional politics and power, the W&J pitched their campaign at an international scale and established itself as part of a global Indigenous solidarity against fossil fuel mining on First Nations people's land.

The W&J's international campaign coincided with significant movements in North America against oil extraction on Indigenous lands such as the protests in Canada against the Keystone Pipeline and in the United States to the Dakota Access Pipeline (Talukdar 2019a). During the international advocacy tour in 2015 the W&J had a firsthand experience of the devastation from large-scale fossil fuel projects when they flew over the tar sands on the land of the Athabasca people in Canada (W&J youth spokesperson interview 20/10/2017). The W&J also built solidarities with Indigenous leaders from Standing Rock Sioux and Chickaloon Village Traditional Council in Turtle Island in the United States who resisted the Dakota Access Pipeline (W&J 2018). The forging of international solidarities between the W&J's resistance and the North American Indigenous struggles signified a resurgence of original sovereign rights over settler colonial state formation (Lyons 2019a).

The intersection of climate change and fossil fuel extraction on Indigenous lands found strategic solidarity from international environmental activism targeted at 'keep(ing) fossil fuels in the ground' including legal activism such as undertaken by the US based Earth Justice, who prepared the W&J's appeals to the United Nations (www.earthjustice.org). Earth Justice's pro-bono legal representations of Indigenous fossil fuel fights have also included the Standing Right Sioux Tribe's resistance to the Dakota Access Pipeline and a Chickaloon Native Village's fight against a coal mine in Alaska (www.earthjustice.org). Through a strategic shift in

its focus, global environmentalism drew attention to sites of fossil fuel extraction on Indigenous lands and made Indigenous land justice essential to climate justice. Global organisations such as 350.org connected stories of Indigenous resistances to protect water, land, culture and heritage from the impacts of large-scale fossil fuel projects across global locations, creating a new human rights-centric narrative for environmentalism.

In Australia, the W&J collaborated with Stop Adani while reiterating the distinctiveness of their struggle on account of its historic dimensions, rights-centric agenda and the disproportionate vulnerability of Indigenous groups in a mining conflict with the state and corporation. Spokesperson Adrian Burrugabba articulated the critical differences of the W&J's fight in a few different ways. At the 2016 Beyond Coal and Gas Summit near Newcastle in New South Wales, he emphasised the higher stakes for the W&J in the fight:

While it will benefit people in general and the environment more widely, this is not an environmental campaign. The Wangan and Jagalingou people have joined with the environmental movement but we are running our own campaign, based on the singular act of self-determination and our right to say 'no' as the Traditional Owners and custodians of our ancestral lands where our ancestors still reside. It is possible to succeed in getting rid of this mining company. Even the economics of global energy alone could stop it. But for us it is about self-determination. If we lose this battle we lose our right to defend our law and custom and culture. It will mean disaster for our people (Burrugabba speech, from summit notes 04/04/2016).

Burrugabba described how the W&J are continuing to struggle with historic injustice and how that makes their struggle unique:

The way I see it, I was born Aboriginal. We had nothing. My parents had to leave the mission station because they had no money...this is the history of this country... All I have is my land, my lore and my culture. And that is what I have been fighting for. No one else can fight that. No one else can explain that (Burrugabba interview in Gregoire 2019a, para 35).

The W&J's campaign and the credibility of its spokesperson Adrian Burragubba was attacked by politicians, the coal mining industry, as well as prominent Indigenous intellectuals who advocated mining for Indigenous prosperity. Adani and Liberal Party politicians labelled Burragubba as an activist who does not represent the interests of the entire native title claim group (Brigg et al. 2017). Indigenous leader Noel Pearson and historian Marcia Langton alleged that the 'No Means No' was a campaign of a minority W&J faction that was doing the bidding of the Greens (Murphy 2017). Being perceived as subsumed within the Stop Adani environmental movement by both Indigenous and non-Indigenous civil society stakeholders, politicians and Adani, served to weaken and even delegitimise the sovereign assertion of historic land justice by the W&J's campaign. How 'No means No' could be represented alongside Stop Adani in the narration of a broader story of resistance to the Carmichael coal mine therefore proved to be an ongoing point of tension between the two movements with the cards being entirely stacked against the former; Stop Adani on the other hand gained social legitimacy in being regarded as extending solidarity to the Indigenous cause (Media and legal liaison to W&J phone interview 05/011/2018).

Speaking at a Stop Adani summit in Brisbane in September 2017 that I attended, Burragubba explained the fallacy of labelling an Indigenous elder an activist by pro-mining critics:

I try not to see myself as an activist. I see my role as a water protector. Every Aboriginal person will tell you that a natural spring is a sacred site with a creation story, dreaming story, a Rainbow Serpent (notes from summit 03/09/2017).

The W&J have rejected the 'centering and normalising of the Black corporate identity' (notes from Indigenous Climate Justice Summit, University of Technology Sydney, 05/07/2018) inherent in the criticism of their resistance by Marcia Langton and reiterated the criticality of their 'Indigenous rights driven work that is anchored in programs on country'. Youth spokesperson Murrawah Johnson talked

about preparations for a 'Wangan and Jagalingou republic soon, so there is something specific that people can rally around, and counter the Marcia Langton kind of position' that argues for mining as the path to Indigenous prosperity (notes from Indigenous Climate Justice Summit, University of Technology Sydney, 05/07/2018).

Speaking at a Sydney Stop Adani Climate Summit in August 2017, Burragubba explained how mining without consent repeats colonial dispossession for Indigenous people, and why their struggle cannot be the same as that of environmentalists:

When an Indigenous elder talks to an audience, the message is still one appealing to White people that we can learn from one another. In the end we might have to sacrifice more than the others. So, appreciate what we do, and we meet you at the crossroad. You are now fighting extractive, Adani, we have been fighting since day 1, 1788 (notes from summit 06/08/2017).

The W&J have expressed mixed opinions about the alignment of narratives of their rights-centric campaign with the climate-change narrative of the environment movement, and the possibility of the latter obfuscating their message. For Murrawah Johnson, the focus on climate risks from fossil fuel projects is helpful approach for drawing attention to Indigenous justice:

Some climate stories make our fight more relevant. Many people have come from the climate story. And got to know about our issues. It has not been intentional whom and how we link to groups. Generally speaking there is a tendency to push our stories to the back. But some climate stories act as a gateway point for our stories, since they point to those of us who are on the frontline due to extraction on our lands (notes from Indigenous Climate Justice Summit, University of Technology Sydney, 05/07/2018).

This agreement on a shared vision with an environmental movement reflects a new Indigenous-green politics that has formed since a strategic shift in environmentalism's focus on 'keeping fossil fuels in the ground'. The Australian

Indigenous youth organisation Seed articulates a specific political narrative of climate justice, which although based on the shared approach, connects the historical reality of colonisation, the present reality of Indigenous struggles against fossil-fuel projects, and the future impacts of climate change into a continuous arc (Baldwin and Copland 2017).

Green-Black solidarity based on a narrative of land-rights and historic justice for Indigenous people is evident within the Stop Adani movement. At Power Shift, an annual environment and climate movement conference organised by the Australian Youth Climate Coalition that I attended in Melbourne in 2017, discussions foregrounded and emphasised solidarity, diversity and inclusiveness of climate stories and decolonisation. Banners hung in the seminar hall of La Trobe University, the venue for the conference, read 'Song Lines not Coal Mines' and Land Rights, Not Mining Rights'. Opening the Conference, the National Directors of Seed said:

What about all the cultural stories from our country, places that are burning, bleaching? That is what I want to talk about. I don't want to talk just about the science, that kind of story is not relevant for me culturally. But I don't know if they will understand or care about my stories, so it is important for me to tell them (summit notes 16/08/2017).

The other W&J perspective takes a cautious approach to working with Stop Adani since the W&J's main focus is to reform Australia's Indigenous rights regime rather than stop coal exports:

'No means No' is a rights-based campaign that tangentially connects to any environmental claims. Stop Adani is a fraction of the W&J's focus. It can obscure the rights issue. We work with the system and to change the system. This is an in-principle fight. Our economic interests are not represented by the system and legislation. Bulk of it is about native title legislation. The W&J also want to see climate justice rightly articulated in Australia. It has to be about Truth Telling. (Media and legal liaison to W&J,

notes from Indigenous Climate Justice Summit, University of Technology Sydney, 05/07/2018).

Apart from a strategic environmental interest in Indigenous sovereignty in relation to fossil fuel extraction on ancestral lands, the new solidarities of Indigenous anti-extractive struggles have also received collaborative assistance from academic projects. A team of academic researchers from the University of Queensland's Global Change Institute chronicled the W&J's resistance through academic and non-academic publications, helped to document responses of families on country, and in workshops to strategically envision a climate future without mining (see Lyons et al. 2017a). This strategic collaboration built up towards a symposium and public forum in Brisbane in July 2018, where a global alliance of Indigenous resistances against fossil fuel extraction called for rethinking of development so that the rights of Indigenous people and the realities of a climate constrained world are both kept at the centre (W&J 2018).

Time and again the W&J held the last line of legal defence against the Carmichael mine as compared to the professional environmental movement (Brigg et al. 2017). Despite this, their efforts have received relatively little national media coverage compared to Stop Adani campaign, except where they have been falsely alleged to be puppets on the strings of the environment movement, demonstrating an obvious inequality in social and structural power between the White and Black streams of the resistance to the Carmichael coalmine (Lyons 2016).

Some relations had been forged between farmers, environmentalists and the Gomeri traditional owners in the anti-coal and anti-coal seam resistances in the Liverpool Plains in New South Wales. However no such direct ties were forged between the Galilee farmers and the W&J. This highlights differences within present social dynamics between graziers and Indigenous people across various coalmining regions in Australia. It reflects a spatial difference between the two regions where coal was contested, and differences in the extent to which the two groups share a fraught history across the two regions.

8.6. Analysis: The significance of climate change and resistances from Central Queensland

The pro-coal coalition consisting of the industry, parts of government and the Newscorp media, has cast the Carmichael issue as a spatial conflict of identities between elite and urban 'greenies' from the south and blue-collar regional Queenslanders (Colvin 2020). Coal mining corporations have leveraged the stereotypical anti-coal identity to ignore farmer's concerns over water allocations and dubious make-good agreements. Indigenous intellectuals and leaders also joined politicians and the industry in dismissing the W&J's historical justice claims and labelled them as pawns for 'greenies'. This stereotyping has ignored concerns brought by local environmental and resident groups about the ecology and economy of Central Queensland and concerns from other coal regions that could face job losses if the Galilee mines opened up at a time of declining coal demand. The Galilee Basin has been deemed a suitable sacrifice zone for the expansion of coal in Central Queensland, Australia's largest coal producing region.

The dominance of the regional scale in the pro-coal advocacy that justified the project on the grounds of economic justice in Central Queensland, has also made it imperative for the national Stop Adani movement to mobilise in the region with the aim of disrupting coal's power. According to Jolley and Richards (2020), the Carmichael controversy demonstrates a conflict between an old politics that attempts to retain coal's power and a new politics that disrupts it. While the pro-coal coalition asserted coal's significance along the vertical scalar geographies of the region, state and nation, the mobilisations reconfigured the politics by building networks and alliances that cut across territorially bounded electoral politics. The inclusion of climate change and climate justice in the contestations of environmentalists, farmers and the W&J has played a central role in re-scaling the Carmichael debate by connecting the local with the global.

At the local scale, the mobilisations challenged coalmining on the basis of livelihoods, water, sacred land and culture and ecology. From a historical perspective, the current local politics over the Carmichael mine serves as a

reminder of the long arc of political transformation from the beginning of settler colonialism, through the state's approach towards groundwater. From the mid-1800s, colonial governments incentivised pastoralism for White settlement through securing artesian water supplies amongst other measures. By the 21st century, as new spaces were drawn into the global extractive economy, Australia's 'client state' incentivised mega coalmines through unlimited and free water allocations that risked water supplies for agriculture.

Although historically responsible for their dispossession through settler colonialism, graziers are now facing a common risk of disruption of country and water alongside Indigenous groups (Mayes 2018; Rifkin 2013). Coal mining is casting both groups as dispensable and invisible (Jolley and Richards 2020). Exacerbation of coalmining in Central Queensland from the 1980s has also shifted farmer-environmentalist hostilities from historic conflict over land clearing towards collaborations for protecting groundwater from the impacts of coalmining. As opposed to conservative politics' ideological scepticism towards climate science, farmer's concerns about climate impacts in the Basin reflect pragmatism on account of the biophysical reality of intensifying droughts in Australia's interiors.

A national-scale mobilisation through the Farmers for Climate Action indicates farmers' political response to structural marginalisation by governments that promote intensive coalmining and fail to act on climate change. At a local scale, a radicalisation against the Basin's farmers' historical political alignment has emerged as a meaningful resistance to their marginalisation. For farmers from the Galilee Basin, addressing the unsustainable practices of the agricultural sector has become a necessary area of focus through the process of challenging their structural marginalisation by the state.

The challenges encountered by Stop Adani's mobilisations highlight critical spatial differences between Central Queensland and coal-impacted areas in New South Wales, where the national movement was forged. Weakened environmental regulations, reduced capacity and attack on environmental groups, and the lack of

alternative viewpoints in regional publications, have left few avenues for anti-coal advocacy. These factors compounded the inability to register concerns about coal mining projects, leaving communities feeling overwhelmed and environmental groups unable to challenge the multiple risks posed by the massive coal projects. It became imperative for Stop Adani to mobilise in Central Queensland, particularly when it became evident that the project could not be stopped despite the success of the divestment campaign in de-funding the project owing to strong political support.

Stop Adani's environmentalism in Central Queensland reflects the new elements of the national anti-coal movement – a strong grassroots approach, niche organisations performing specialised activist tactics, and the deployment of new tools and technologies for 'scaling-up' mass mobilisations and electoral engagement. The political rescue of Carmichael left direct non-violent disruption of mine-and-rail construction as the only effective mechanism for civil resistance, in a repetition of a pattern seen in New South Wales. Camp Binbee's vision of collective disruption as essential for social change reflects the politics of earlier blockade camps in the Hunter region and Liverpool Plains. As in the earlier cases, non-violent direct action in the Galilee Basin has embedded a global call for climate justice. Further, with the environment movement significantly relying on mass actions and grassroots disruptions against coalmining for over decade, such actions have come to signify necessary civil tactics for democratising Australia's coal-driven economic growth. Grassroots disruptions have continued to be relevant forms of resistance to the Carmichael project even after its commencement.

The W&J have internationalised their call for self-determination through establishing solidarities with other Indigenous struggles against fossil fuel extraction. Indigenous climate justice is now understood as both the remediation of historic dispossession and resistance to fossil fuel extraction on Indigenous lands. This understanding has allowed a resurgence of a call for sovereign rights by Indigenous peoples. The W&J have emerged as leaders in the global climate change and human rights movement and challenged Australia to meet its international

responsibilities (Lyons 2016). They have exposed coal's institutional power in Australia as embedded within the structures of the native title system. The W&J's international alliances and solidarities made an assertive call for strengthening Indigenous rights for self-determination and free, prior and informed consent as a necessary step towards climate and energy justice.

The W&J's tactical relations with Stop Adani movement underscore the distinctiveness and the sovereignty of their campaign. As a land rights movement, No Means No stands out on account of its outright rejection of mining and its direct challenge to Australia's native title system. Owing to the nature of its resistance, No means No has received critical support from the legal and academic community, and developed strategic international relations with environmental legal networks. The W&J has maintained a sovereign distinction between their campaign for historic justice, a fight no one else can fight for them, and the ahistorical environmental movement that aimed to stop the coal mine. This dynamic between No means No and Stop Adani also signifies a new dimension for Indigenous-green relations in Australia predicated on environmentalists being able to meet traditional owners 'at the crossroad'.

The three anti-coal contestations have used climate change in distinctive ways to politicise their resistances to the controversial Carmichael coalmine and to re-scale the pro-coal claim for it. While Stop Adani and farmers have localised and particularised the problem of climate change through attempting to shift coal's political power, the Wangan and Jagalingou internationalised their struggle for self-determination based on a political understanding of Indigenous climate justice that asserts Indigenous sovereignty. Through this process of distinct and intersecting rescaling of a coalmining conflict in Central Queensland, the mobilisations have allowed for alternative social, economic and environmental visions to emerge.

8.7. Conclusion

The shift in environmentalism's strategic focus has allowed a new political and social understanding of climate action to emerge, one that connects the local social and political dynamics of stopping coal extraction with the global need to reduce green house emissions. At the same time, Indigenous narratives have put the historical dimension of colonial dispossession and present injustices of fossil fuel extraction on Indigenous lands at the centre of an understanding of global climate justice. The mobilisations from Central Queensland reflect these new understandings and demonstrate political turns that are strategically relevant for climate action's new imperatives.

Like previous anti-coal grassroots environmentalisms in New South Wales, Stop Adani's activism in Central Queensland has attempted to disrupt coal's dominance in a region of intensive coal extraction. Although it could not stop the coalmine from commencing, it had a democratising effect on the region's dominant economic narrative of coal-led growth. The farmers' mobilisation reflected the long arc of political economic transformation. The crisis of political identity experienced by the farmers indicates a formative moment for pathways for sustainability for Galilee Basin. The internationalisation of their assertion of sovereignty and self-determination added new dimensions to national-scale land rights campaign of the W&J people. In solidarity with other Indigenous narratives against fossil fuel extraction and climate justice, it has cast a global spotlight on the conflict over the Carmichael coalmine that is centred in historic and present Indigenous concerns.

The differences between the three anti-coal constituents reflect the significance of stopping coal and need for climate justice in building a shared imperative across critical and historical divides. The collective resistances from Central Queensland demonstrate a relational politics that is characteristic of new anti-coal activism in Australia. The specificity of their collaborations reflects the realities of space and history and adds new elements to the understanding and dynamics of Indigenous-green relations in Australia.

Chapter 9 – Analysis

Defining a global outlook for environmentalism

9.1 Introduction

This chapter analyses the comparative themes that emerge from the Indian case study in Chapters 3, 4, and 5, and Australian case study in Chapters 6, 7 and 8. It interweaves and compares the patterns as well as differences in the two anti-coal activisms. Through a discursive approach, this chapter constructs a proposed global outlook for environmental activism. A globally representative outlook signifies an understanding and acknowledgement of both similarities and differences in the materialities and socio-political factors between the North and South, and how they shape and affect activism. It also signifies finding solidarity amongst the varieties of human and environmental justice concerns that now find common cause with climate justice. How common ground can be achieved (both conceptually and in practice) and what collective meaning of justice can emerge (the narrative) are both important factors in approaching a global outlook for environmental activism today.

Section 9.2 discusses the central theme of climate justice in the collective anti-coal resistance in Australia, and how and why the narrative and context for the politicisation of the climate issue is different in India. Section 9.3 discusses the relationships of green groups with other anti-coal actors in this thesis – farmers and the W&J traditional owners in Australia and the forest-dwelling Mahan community in India – and the possibility such relational politics hold for defining a different kind of society in the post-carbon era. Section 9.4 discusses the similarities and distinctions in the lands rights resistance of the W&J and Mahan, between the respective land rights regimes and the implementation of land rights by governments. Section 9.5 discusses the patterns and differences in how

environmental organisations in Australia and the international ENGO Greenpeace in India framed the national anti-coal campaigns. It discusses how these campaigns negotiated the respective political economies of coal, how both governments responded with pro-coal and anti-democratic measures, and also how the risks and consequences of government attack on anti-coal activists differ between these two contexts. It also discusses the tool and tactics of the two activisms.

Section 9.6 highlights how the case study chapters built on existing political ecological literature in interpreting the research findings and discusses the contributions of this thesis to the political ecological field. Section 9.7 outlines a global outlook for the new approach of environmental activism. Subsection 9.7.1 gives an overview of the comparative analyses of the two activisms (and all the comparative elements discussed in the previous sections) through a table. Subsection 9.7.2 discusses how common ground can be found across the differences in the contexts, politics and realities of the two anti-coal activisms, by focussing on the similar patterns of the power of coal and corporations over politics and environmental governance. Subsection 9.7.3 expands further on the strongest element of resonance between the Indian and Australian activisms, a focus on human rights and land justice. It asks how this focus, and environmentalists' relationships with frontline communities against coal, can be meaningfully deepened? Based on these, subsection 9.7.4 concludes Section 9.7 by conceiving a global outlook for environmentalism as one that includes and represents differences, and attempts to find common ground between them.

Section 9.8 suggests areas for further research to further define and delineate elements for a global outlook of this new environmental activism. Section 9.9, the conclusion, reemphasises the purpose of this thesis and its findings, which is to provide insights for activists, practitioners and researchers in the field of energy transition and social movements on a global-scale.

9.2. Various concepts and a North-South divide in climate justice

The politicisation of coal on the basis of the risk of climate change caused by carbon emissions has introduced negative attributes previously not extensively associated with the worlds' most widely used energy source, coal. Along with oil and gas, it is now considered a dirty, risky and dangerous fossil fuel. The so-called demonisation of coal by climate activists has motivated the industry, and Australia's pro-coal politicians, as noted, to defend coal, through advertising campaigns claiming coal to be good for humanity, and measures to promote 'clean coal'.

The converse is also true. Challenging coal extraction is bringing specific and tangible political traction to climate change. In the present era, affected communities are challenging coal mining on multiple grounds that include the risk of climate change. The linking of the various issues has entangled abstract carbon emission in material and historic concerns over land and natural resources. In anti-coal resistances that bring together multiple grievances, climate change is often seen as a boundary object and a common reference point for the different actors who invoke it for different reasons. Consequently, climate change has become part of the terrain on which political and social struggles are fought (Everts and Muller 2020).

The politicisation of coal mining is thus generating new claims for climate justice. This can be seen in the collective process of politicising the multiple grievances brought against the Carmichael coal mine, as noted in Chapters 6,7 and 8. However, the same cannot be said about the Indian case, where the issue of climate change has been less prominent, as seen in Chapters 3,4 and 5. I will now discuss the various political approaches to climate justice seen through these two cases, and the critical differences between their Northern (Australian) and Southern (Indian) contexts.

9.2.1 Climate justice, livelihood and sovereignty in the Galilee Basin

In Australia, as seen in the case of movements emerging from the coal regions in New South Wales, the common risk of coal mining has linked anti-coal constituents together into unlikely alliances, particularly farmers allying themselves with environmentalists and Indigenous groups. Concerns about the impact of mining on surface and ground water, the loss of farming land, and health impacts from pollution near mine sites, also served to unite groups across urban and rural regions (Connor et al., 2009). What has emerged even more distinctly through the Stop Adani movement, which gained a national base of supporters primarily in the largest cities of Sydney, Melbourne, and Brisbane, is the dominant concern over climate change. Stop Adani has made the issue of the so-called 'climate-wrecking' Carmichael mine a shorthand for the government's failed commitments on climate (Murphy 2017). Climate change acts as a thread that ties the several concerns against the coal mine together into a larger movement narrative.

Even though the three strands in the movement - the environmentalists, the farmers and Indigenous groups - have expressed concern about climate change, their specific imperatives for contesting coalmining, and consequently what climate justice has meant for them, are significantly different. For the farmers in the Galilee Basin, climate justice has come to signify water supply and the future security of agriculture. Their imperative for demanding climate action has been shaped by the hardships they faced during the Queensland drought in 2018.

The Queensland government's allocation of free and unlimited water for the Carmichael mine during the drought exacerbated their concerns over water security. The weakness of the federal government's drought response measures, along with its politics of climate-denialism, heightened their concerns about future security for their livelihoods. As opposed to the earlier Lock the Gate movement, which did not explicitly advocate for climate policy action, these experiences shaped the Basin's farmers' stand against the coal mines as a call for national climate action.

For the W&J people, against the history of Indigenous dispossession in Australia's settler colonial society, climate justice has come to signify the need for sovereignty, particularly through the native title legal system. The imperative for the W&J to challenge the Carmichael coal mine was based on their experience of the repressive native title system that favoured mining corporations and did not allow Indigenous native title groups to exercise their free, prior and informed consent on mining operations, an internationally recognised Indigenous human right. Their international links with Indigenous fossil fuel struggles in North America have strengthened and collectivised their claim for sovereignty over their traditional lands.

Although 'No Means No' was a land rights campaign that aimed to expose the failure of Australian native title, it both acknowledged the climate change problem, and articulated a form of Indigenous climate justice based on the demand to redress historic injustices. Climate injustice through fossil fuel projects on Indigenous lands formed the basis for their international activism, such as through their alliance with the environmental legal network Earth Justice.

The various imperatives, politics and concepts of climate justice in the Australian movement are articulated against the context of a pro-coal and climate-denialist national politics. In addition to the environmental movement, the anti-coal arguments of the farmers and the W&J have also been recast within a common frame of climate justice in response to this context. Both the W&J and farmers have articulated climate injustice as an extension of their grievances against coal mining in the Galilee Basin, reflecting a dialectical process of meaning making in the collective movement. As empowered civil society actors, who have visibility and access to various platforms, they have linked their grievances to climate change of their own accord.

9.2.2. Forest rights and democratic rights in Mahan

However the same argument cannot be made for the people of Mahan. Anti-coal narratives emerging from Southern environmentalism are often re-interpreted as

climate justice narratives by other (globally oriented) actors although the livelihood-focused movement itself might not directly express climate change as a concern. In India, Greenpeace connected the Mahan struggle with the issue of climate change by linking the anniversary celebrations of victory over coal mining with the 'Break Free From Fossil Fuel's' global event in 2017. As a global ENGO it re-interpreted the movement's significance as a quest for climate justice through its campaign (Talukdar 2019b). Overall, in India, the narrative of forest and democratic rights dominated both the local and the broader civil society discourse in support of the anti-coal activism, with concerns over climate change not being strongly or directly articulated.

Acknowledging this difference, as witnessed at Mahan, can help climate justice research recognize the multi-layered politics of 'glocal' resistances, especially in the South. Distinctions between issues of local identity and politics versus globally oriented activism can be seen in both Northern and Southern resistances. The global cause may serve to undermine or to compliment the local issue; in this case Greenpeace and MSS's activism proved complimentary and effective in their respective socio-political spheres. However, in the Southern context, as noted in the Mahan case, global-local relationships can raise stronger questions about the agency of subaltern actors, including questions of who speaks for local people and how their narratives are re-interpreted at the global level. The question of agency, access to various platforms, and visibility distinguish the case of Mahan from that of local actors in the Galilee Basin – farmers and the W&J people – and reflect a North-South difference that I discuss further in the next section.

The lack of connection with climate change issues amongst India's livelihoods focused people's movements is both on account of socio-economic and political differences. 'Environmentalism of the poor' is centred on the urgent challenges of resisting land dispossession and disruption of livelihoods from local environmental degradation. This must not be mistaken as the environmental parochialism of the Southern poor. Instead, it signifies how industrialisation poses imminent and persistent risks to their survival and security, as noted in discussions on Indian environmentalism in Chapters 2 and 3). Being overwhelmed

with the daily struggle for survival, as also seen in Singrauli, India's so called energy capital (see Chapter 5), environmentalism of the poor's assertions remain grounded in immediate injustices.

Further, in comparison to well-educated, middle-class urban activists, environmentalism of the poor movements are composed of largely rural populations that can often lack a scientific understanding of the issue of climate change, even though they are attuned to changing weather patterns. The South Asian People's Action on Climate Crisis (SAPACC), formed in 2019, is a very recent and unique collaboration between livelihood-focused people's movements, indigenous groups, trade unions and farmers across South Asia. It marks an emergent space in mass activism in South Asia, making climate change central to people's movements and attempting to link the existent malcontents of ecosystems-dependent subsistence communities with the broader problem of climate change (Adve 2020).

Unlike in Australia, the Indian government carefully positions itself as a supporter of global climate action. Postcolonial governments such as India's point to the West's historic responsibility for climate change, and call for climate justice in terms of India needing the carbon space to grow (Goodman 2016). Although this 'moral' position generates a deep contradiction, particularly in terms of climate's worsening effects on vulnerable, ecosystems dependent Indian communities, it does not generate the specific political imperative such as in Australia to mobilise against the government on the issue, even for urban-based communities.

A fourth factor is that, although the link between coal and climate change is well understood by urban-based middle class activists, ENGOs do not usually target coal on the grounds of climate change, as noted in Chapter 4. Given the postcolonial developmental anxieties of the Indian government, such advocacy is considered risky, as was confirmed when the Indian government targeted Greenpeace (Talukdar 2018d). Overall, these postcolonial contradictions of the Indian government generate a different paradox from that of coal-led Northern economies such as Australia's. The political and social differences combine to

generate different movement imperatives for environmental and grassroots activists.

Responding to this paradoxical national context, Greenpeace strategically framed its Indian campaign to target forest destruction in central India from coal mining, using this as a proxy for its global climate strategy. The proxy approach was particularly relevant due to global activism's new vision of working in solidarity with communities fighting coal mining. Greenpeace's Indian campaign was framed in alignment with the political struggles of the environmentalism of the poor in the country's coal and forest rich areas. Even though climate justice assumes a derived rather than directly articulated significance for subsistence-based Southern communities such as in Mahan, the inclusion of their actions in a global mix of anti-coal struggles adds new dimensions to the concept of climate justice. With this, climate justice can be expanded to signify forest rights for Adivasi and other forest-dependent communities in central India.

The rejection of coal mining by the people of Mahan was based on the assertion of their newfound forest rights, and signified shifting ground within India's environmental movement. Against the historical context of the dispossession of Adivasi and forest-dependent communities under colonial-era laws, and its continuation during India's post-independence industrial development, the Forest Rights Act and other related legal mechanisms have brought a new language of rights into environmental justice movements. Despite having formal constitutional rights over their lands in Scheduled areas, the rights of Adivasis were superseded in practice by the priority given to coal production in government policies in postcolonial India. Through legal tools like the FRA, forest-dependent communities could claim rights over their forests, reject coal mining, and protect their forest-dependent livelihoods, potentially democratizing development 'from the ground up'.

However, the low levels of implementation by state governments and low awareness amongst forest-dependent communities of their forest rights have remained as key challenges to community empowerment in central India. The FRA

has also been undermined by India's neoliberal development model: provisions within the FRA and PESA for communities' participation in resource-development, including requiring consent for coal mining and construction of thermal plants, have been eroded under the Narendra Modi government from 2014 (Sethi 2019). Therefore, in the fraught context of India's development, climate justice for forest-dwelling communities impacted by coal mining signifies both being able to save their forests and livelihoods, and protect their legal rights under the FRA.

A multi-dimensional global understanding of climate justice needs to recognise both the importance of these newfound rights, and their vulnerability in the context of government violations that effectively create a crisis in the exercise of human rights in India. This vulnerability poses a challenge for theorising environmental and climate justice in a transitional Southern context (O'Neill 2012), especially in the context of rapid, neoliberal economic growth such as in India.

To summarise the themes from this section, climate justice can be applied as a common framework to understand a multi-stranded and multi-constituent anti-coal movement in a Northern context as seen through the Australian case. Here, various claims came together to create a collective meaning of climate justice against the Carmichael coal mine in the Galilee Basin. However, in a Southern context such as India, climate change is not directly articulated as seen in the case of the anti-coal movement against the Mahan coal mine. This North-South distinction needs to be remembered on account of a highly unequal Indian society, with a fragmented social movement sphere due to the urban-rural divide and a contested national context of economic development, within which the imperatives and narratives of environmental mobilisations take shape.

As noted, transplanting Northern environmental discourses to the South has hampered a contextualised understanding of the relation between poverty and environmental justice to emerge (Lawhorns 2013). While interpreting Southern anti-coal activism as assertion of climate justice, western environmental justice researchers and climate activists need to 'tie' climate justice to various risks that

communities vulnerable to destructive industrialisation in the South encounter. They also need to regard mechanisms through which the land and forest rights of vulnerable communities can be strengthened as necessary actions towards their climate justice.

9.3. Green relations with Indigenous and farmers' groups

Klein (2014) envisions environmentalism's new approach as a global-scale 'blockadia' of activists working in solidarity with local struggles against fossil-fuel projects. The relations of environmental activists with other anti-coal actors assume significance within this approach. In the Australian case study I have discussed two sets of relations between environmental activists operating under the imperative of keeping coal in the ground – with farmers in the Galilee Basin, with the W&J traditional owners. In the Indian case study I have discussed the relations between environmental activists from Greenpeace and the community at Mahan. Together, these three sets of relations of environmental activists offer various perspectives and critical details about a new kind of relational politics that now characterises environmentalism globally. I will now discuss these relationships, and reflect on what and how new understanding is generated through these relationships, and what they signify for environmental activism globally.

9.3.1. Environmentalist-farmer relations in Australia

Both Lock the Gate (LTG) and the Farmers for Climate Action (FFCA) demonstrate a new approach for environmentalists based on finding common ground with farming communities affected by coal and coal seam gas mining. FFCA is a national alliance of farmers that is concerned about climate change and focuses on issues of sustainability (of land management, agriculture, and the use of natural resources). The Galilee farmers opposed to the coal mines, who are also FFCA members, raised systemic and structural concerns about mining that were both ecological and economic, and envisioned a future for the Basin beyond coal mining. Groundwater allocations to the Galilee coal mines emerged as the most critical factor in their

alliance with the Stop Adani movement, which involved collaborative campaigning against free and unlimited water allocations and in joint legal challenges against the Carmichael and Alpha mine's environmental approvals. Groundwater issues also dominated the narrative and the politics of the state-level Stop Adani movement in Queensland and generated mass demonstrations that included these farmers.

The issue of groundwater allocation for coal mining and the risk of groundwater contamination from coal seam gas extraction emerged as a significant political issue at the peak of Australia's coal boom in 2011. This sparked environmentalist-farmer alliances and compelled the federal government to take legislative measures to ameliorate concerns over coal projects by adding a water trigger into the EPBC Act (see Chapter 6). The interviews in this study revealed that environmentalists formed collaborations based on how farmers approached sustainability and their vision for change. While environmentalists were compelled to transform their ideology and politics due to the twin risks of climate change and coal mining, farmers too had to recalibrate their approach towards land and water management, and advocate for sustainability within their own industry. This direction is reflected in the aims and objectives of the FFCA, and through the Galilee Basin's farmers' articulations about the need for sustainability in agriculture.

Historical political power structures in Queensland have been changed through the increasing influence of the coal and coal seam gas mining industries on governments in the state. The marginalisation of farmers by these governments, particularly in the Galilee Basin where the state had supported the establishment and development of pastoralism since settler colonialism, has led to a new approach of forming alliances outside formal politics, and especially towards collaborating with environmentalists, despite a history of antagonistic relations, for instance over the issue of land clearing. For the Basin's farmers, forging alliances with environmentalists assumed a critical significance due to the marginalisation of their interests within the National Party that would normally represent them (see Chapter 8).

The relation between the Galilee farmers and the Stop Adani movement has added another dimension to environmentalist-farmer relations in Australia, by making ground water security in the Great Artesian Basin through stopping the Galilee coal mines synonymous with climate action. The alliance attempted to democratise Australian politics that has been captured by fossil fuel interests. Due to the presence of neoliberal logics in community discourses in Australia, an environmentalist-farmer alliance is unlikely to fundamentally question structural inequality, or translate into a resistance against capitalism, as compared to the developing world where these themes are central to mining conflicts (Arashiro 2017). However, in the absence of government action, the environmentalist-farmer relations, forged at the brink of a crisis in the agriculture sector and rural Australia, and against the expansion of coal mining and coal seam gas extraction on agricultural lands, hold possibilities for forcing long-term sustainability in Australia's political economy.

9.3.2 Green-Black relations in Australia

The W&J people formed a tactical alliance with the Stop Adani movement based on the need for collective opposition; however they asserted the independence of their land rights campaign and the distinction between their historic claim for land justice and the environmental movement's demand for climate action. Through an acknowledgement of the linkages between Indigenous dispossession by settler colonialism in Australia and its continuation through coal extraction on Indigenous lands, the Stop Adani movement's narrative of solidarity with the W&J reflected a degree of political maturity. The narratives of solidarity reflect environmentalism's new strategic focus of 'keeping fossil fuels in the ground' through alliances with frontline struggles, particularly Indigenous resistances. Nationally, at Stop Adani events and activist-focussed conferences such as Beyond Coal and Gas and Power Shift, messages, banners, and session themes reflected an acknowledgement of historic Indigenous dispossessions (see Chapter 8).

The W&J collaborated in environmental campaign activities, most prominently the fossil fuel divestment campaign. The world tour of the banks and the collaboration on the divestment campaign constituted one of the key pillars of the W&J–Stop Adani relationship. Such divestment campaigns, based on collaborations between environmentalists and Indigenous groups fighting fossil fuel extraction on their lands, characterise a model of activism associated with the global strategy of halting ‘unburnable fuels’. The W&J extended relationships with environmentalists on a global scale through their engagement of the environmental legal network Earth Justice to appeal to the United Nations about Australia’s violation of international Indigenous rights.

The W&J’s international appeal for justice was strongly aligned with global climate activism’s new approach. It was framed within the broader context of climate justice and the historic significance of Indigenous struggles against fossil-fuel projects, and it asserted the need for Indigenous sovereignty. Alongside Indigenous resistances from North America against mega-fossil fuel projects such as Keystone XL Pipeline and the Dakota Access Pipeline, the W&J’s campaign emerged as a leading climate justice and Indigenous rights movement (Lyons 2016). Given historical tensions between Indigenous groups and environmentalists from a non-alignment of visions and Indigenous groups finding their worldviews marginalised, the relationships between the W&J and environmentalists, the independence of the W&J’s campaign and their global reach, add new dimensions to Australia’s Green-Black relations. Overall, these relationships with environmentalists reflect new patterns in Green-Black politics made possible by environmentalism’s new approach.

There is a need for environmental activists and environmental justice researchers to go beyond seeing such relations as tactical alliances aimed merely to facilitate ‘leav(ing) coal in the ground’. While the narratives of climate movements now acknowledge the larger struggles of Indigenous people with colonialism and capitalism, as noted in the case of Stop Adani, they also need to systematically consider how Indigenous people’s participation in collective resistances can be

instrumental in determining a different future and social trajectories (Latulippe and Klenk 2020).

9.3.3. ENGO relations with livelihoods struggles in India

In a contrast with the autonomy in the nature of the W&J's relationship with the Stop Adani movement, in India, Greenpeace played a leading role in transforming both the Mahan community's knowledge about their own rights and perceptions on forest ownership, and their motivation to fight coal mining. The Greenpeace-Mahan relation lacked the inter-racial dimension present in the case of the Stop-Adani-W&J relationship; the latter being a distinctive characteristic of settler-colonial societies. Further, since the Mahan community represents a social mix between various castes as well as Adivasi and non-Adivasi families (see Chapter 5), their relationship with Greenpeace also lacked a specific inter-ethnic dimensions. However, it was predicated on a socio-economic divide that is characteristic of postcolonial Southern societies like India: between educated, urban and middle-class activists, and rural, subsistence communities who make up the core of livelihood struggles (see Williams and Mawdsley 2006).

The Greenpeace-Mahan Sangharsh Samiti (MSS) relationship involved trust and co-dependency, between the urban activists who educated the community about the laws, and the local movement members who helped them understand the power structures and social complexities of village life, and a forest-centric way of living. For the people of Mahan, although their relationship with the forest did not change in a material sense given their continuing dependency on its resources, with an understanding of their legal rights came a distinct sense of ownership, and a heightened sense of what was at stake of being lost (see Chapter 5). For the Greenpeace Mahan team, working alongside the MSS meant both learning to 'make room' (see Latulippe and Klenk 2020) for the logics and actions of the Mahan community in their campaign strategies, and effectively decolonising their own understanding of grassroots activism in the Southern context.

Overall, the nature of the Greenpeace-MSS relationship can be viewed as a community empowerment model rather than a tactical alliance as seen in the Australian case. Beyond being educated about their forest rights and learning about the mechanisms through which to assert them, the Mahan community's relationship with Greenpeace also influenced a perceptible (even if small) change in their social norms and behaviour around issues of caste and gender. After the success in stopping the coal mine, the relationship resulted in discussions for a sustainable and alternative development pathway through an economic scheme based on the collection and sale of forest products. Being a newly radicalised community, Mahan did not demonstrate the autonomy or self-assertion (beyond the local scale) that long-established people's movements for livelihoods and forest rights in India could reflect. Their vision broadened through the association with the Greenpeace activists, leading to their joining the National Association of People's Movements (NAPM).

Participation in national level events of the anti-coal campaign such as the action at the Essar headquarters in Mumbai and meeting the Minister for Tribal Affairs in New Delhi about the *Gram Sabha* forgery, helped MSS members to understand the bigger significance of their struggle. This broadened perspective was reflected in their interpretation of their actions as dissent in a democracy, and celebrating the victory over the Mahan coal mine as Democracy Day, against the broader context of government crackdowns on civil rights.

As an international ENGO, Greenpeace was able to mobilise the campaign resources and funding to run an extended campaign in a remote Indian location for five years. This capability was a prime factor behind the formation of the movement, its actions, and its relations. The crack down on Greenpeace and the freezing of its bank accounts raised uncomfortable questions about the ability of Greenpeace to continue supporting this remote campaign that had also proven risky. The alliance formally ended with Greenpeace closing its Mahan office. The Indian political situation and the attacks on Greenpeace raised broader questions about the vulnerability of relationships forged by international groups based on

environmentalism's new approach, with communities at the frontline of coal extraction in the Global South.

The relationship with MSS had also proven beneficial for Greenpeace India and how its work is valued within the Indian environmental movement. Grassroots Indian movements in general take a cautious approach towards trusting international NGOs, regarding them as pursuing their own strategic interests while ignoring the long-term needs of communities. However, an NAPM leader changed his perception about Greenpeace after learning about the strong community-empowerment focus of the international group's campaign in Mahan (see Chapter 5). But Greenpeace's withdrawal once again put such concerns back on the table. Whether international activist groups can find alignment with the long-term sustainable development needs of subsistence communities, and whether their model of activism is conducive for livelihoods communities in the South, has remained an active topic of debate within India's grassroots and people's movements.

Indigenous community members working in alliance with environmentalists are not only fighting against the challenge of coal mining and climate change; they are resisting persistent structural barriers including illegal occupation and suppression of Indigenous authority to exercise jurisdiction over their lands, ongoing genocide, social, economic and health gaps and higher exposure to environmental harms (Latulippe and Klenk 2020). The community in Mahan, living in the last-remaining forests fringing the coal mining ravaged landscape of Singrauli, encounters several such barriers. Their historical and continuing struggles are with the structural challenges of colonial and capitalist domination linked to industrialisation (Whyte 2017).

From their perspective, an involvement with a global ENGO is likely to raise legitimate hopes that the engagement can also help to tackle some of their systemic concerns. Greenpeace's engagement in Mahan raises broader questions about what could constitute a long-term process of mutually valuable engagement (see Whyte 2013) between global environmental actors and Southern Indigenous

actors. Such an engagement would need to regard the latter as not merely facilitators in global activism's strategy of stopping coal, but as instrumental in determining different social trajectories for a post-carbon future.

Together, the three sets of relations of environmentalists discussed in this section – relationships between environmentalists and farmers and Green-Black relations in Australia, and between an ENGO and a rural, forest-dwelling community in India – raise questions about how these relationships can be deepened beyond tactical alliances to merely stop coal extraction, towards creating shared, just and sustainable futures beyond coal.

9.4. Indigenous resistances compared (W&J and Mahan)

As Indigenous struggles for land rights, the resistances of the W&J and the people of Mahan have emerged as most significant aspects for comparison. Both the W&J and the people of Mahan were radicalised through processes and events that exposed their respective state's biases towards mining corporations and roles in manufacturing consent for mining. The events revealed strong similarities in land rights issues across the North and South.

The native title regime in Australia and forest rights in India, and the experience of the W&J and the Mahan community with procedures under respective laws, reflect similarities and differences in settler and postcolonial societies in terms of the intent of land reforms, and the risks of their dilution and violation by the state machinery to favour mining corporations. I will now discuss these aspects and what a land rights approach might signify for a global anti-coal movement for climate justice.

9.4.1 Manufacturing Indigenous consent for mining

In the Australian case, the W&J experienced the coercive native title system and how the mining corporation took advantage of it to deny them free, prior and informed consent. They refused further participation in the Native Title Tribunal

process on the Indigenous Land Use Agreement (ILUA) dispute because the ‘cards were already stacked against them’ (W&J 2015a). The regional native title agency authorised the disputed ILUA determination meeting despite it being filled with families not permitted to vote on a W&J ILUA. Beyond the native title system, the state and federal governments supported the disputed ILUA, disregarding contentions of the W&J family council about its invalidity. Queensland issued the mining leases to Adani on the basis of the contested ILUA, even while the matter was being decided in the Federal Court. The federal government passed rushed amendments to the Native Title Act in order for the ILUA to retain its legal validity after the McGlade decision from Western Australia that invalidated all ILUAs signed without the consent of all members of the representative group of all native title holders (see Chapter 7).

The forgery of consent at the *Gram Sabha* (‘village council meeting’) in Mahan and the signing of the ‘fake ILUA’ at the Adani-organised W&J people’s meeting indicate similar patterns through which state agencies and the local administration can act in both Northern and Southern contexts to compromise free prior and informed Indigenous consent for mining. These incidents should not be considered on a stand-alone basis, but as indicators of a larger process that serves to prioritise mining over Indigenous rights (Chowdhury and Aga 2020).

In the Indian case, the local movement members experienced the interference of the state and the company on an everyday basis. This culminated in the forgery of signatures and acted as a wake up call for its leaders. The fraudulent consent was supported at the highest level, with the environment ministry in the Indian government granting a forest clearance for the Mahan coal mining project, despite the tribal affair’s ministry in its own government rejecting the outcome and asking for a new *Gram Sabha* to be organised (see Chapter 5). The Mahan forgery served as yet another reminder of what has emerged as a consistent pattern of violation of the Forest Rights Act by state governments, which are obligated to comply with its requirements yet eager for mining revenues. The FRA has often acted as a double-edged sword for communities in forested regions, due to its undemocratic violation by the state to facilitate mining (Chowdhury 2016).

9.4.2. Forest Rights Act versus Native Title: provisions and implementations

A comparison of the Australian Native Title and Indian Forest Rights regimes and the ways the respective states implement, dilute or violate them to favour mining interests, can help to understand the similarities and differences in the legal-political condition of Indigenous land rights in Australia and India.

In Australia, the passage of the *Native Title Act 1992* initiated an 'era of agreement making' between Indigenous native title groups and mining corporations and forced a change in the earlier 'bareknuckle racism' of the latter's approach (Langton 2012). Although limited in capacity by not allowing native title groups the right to refuse consent to mining and recognising a limited form of Indigenous title to land, over its first 30 years of operation, along with other land regimes, it contributed to an Indigenous estate that covered 20% of Australia, including some of the most ecologically intact landscapes in the north of the continent (Altman et al. 2007).

The mining boom from the mid-1990s changed the relationship of the state towards Indigenous native title groups through economic liberalism and the prioritisation of mining and economic freedom over civil liberties of Indigenous people (Quiggin 2005). This approach is reflected in the various amendments to land rights laws since 1998. The state's prioritisation of mining for the economic development of remote Indigenous communities effectively contradicted its own intent towards land rights, which was based on a discourse of connection to country and conservation, and directly threatened the expanding national Indigenous estate (Altman 2012b). However, the mining boom also changed the discourse of land debates in Australia through the ability of Indigenous groups to participate as significant stakeholders in matters related to mining.

In contrast to Australia, the issues with the progressive *Forest Rights Act 2006* (FRA), which allows Adivasis and other forest-dwelling communities to have a say on mining on their lands, including the right to veto projects, have played out at an

entirely different level. The passing of this act created the possibility for an alternate discourse to mining extraction-led development to emerge. It contains progressive provisions, such as allowing *Gram Sabhas* ('village councils') the sovereign and autonomous right to decide about mining on people's lands.

But the role played by state governments, through slow and flawed implementations, high rates of rejections of community claims, and violation through forging consent, has undermined the FRA's lofty objective of righting historic wrongs and giving communities free, prior and informed consent over mining and other developments on their lands. The removal of already-granted community forest rights in a few cases by the state has set a dangerous precedent for Scheduled Areas around India. The dilution of the act's various provisions, especially through drastically shortening the period for consultation and consent on mining projects, remains a constant challenge for community rights in India (Sethi 2016).

A difference between the land rights campaign of the W&J and the MSS has to do with the latter's lived presence at the site of the project, which reflects the reality of the lived presence of communities on the land in the Global South. This difference in the Global South adds a further criticality to the human rights issue of the communities' loss of lands from coal mining and other developments. As noted in Chapter 3, development-induced-displacements that affect Adivasis the most have been a constant feature of India's postcolonial industrialisation, both before and after neoliberalisation. It has therefore remained a central focus of the Indian environmentalism of the poor. This Southern imperative in particular raises a vital question for global environmentalism's new approach: whether its aims can systematically align with the issue of land justice for communities at the frontline of coal extraction?

Summarising the themes from section 9.4, although the two cases differ in the scale and extent of denial of Indigenous rights, the state-based administrative and legal processes, and the actions of states and federal governments in both Australia and India reflect a clear prioritisation of mining corporations over Indigenous

concerns. However, a structural division is evident in the implementation of Indigenous land rights by the state between the Northern context of Australia and the Southern context of India. In the latter case, despite stronger Indigenous legal rights, their implementation remains so poor and their violation so significant that it creates a 'crisis of democracy'.

The centrality of human rights violations through land dispossession for coal mining (as well as other industrial projects) in Southern environmental justice movements such as in India, raises a vital question for global environmentalism: whether its aims can systematically align with the issue of land justice for communities at the frontline of coal extraction?

9.5. Coal politics and environmental campaigns in India and Australia

The national politics of the two anti-coal environmental campaigns in this thesis offer insights about how the new approach of environmentalism negotiated the political economies and power structures of coal in Australia and India respectively, and what similar patterns and differences emerge in the social and political dialectic on coal and climate change, and the state of democracy.

9.5.1. Transformation through neoliberalism and the minerals boom

The parallel processes of neoliberalisation of the Indian economy (which also significantly increased coal mining and coal mining related conflicts) and the mineral boom in Australia have acted as dominant forces in reshaping the campaign approaches of ENGOs in the respective countries.

The arc of Greenpeace's engagements in Indian environmental conflicts reflects the changing political economy of development under neoliberalism, with the 'moral' ground of its advocacy (Doherty and Doyle 2007) shifting from exposing the role of international corporations in causing pollution in India, to directly questioning

environmental and social risks from domestically-owned private industrial projects (Talukdar 2019b).

Greenpeace's climate and energy campaign has consistently advocated for a reduction of coal usage and a pathway for the national economy to increase renewables, with an emphasis on decentralised and small-scale renewable energy sources to meet India's diverse energy needs (Bhagat 2018). But its campaign to directly stop coal mining took an indirect and multi-step approach. It started with the 'Ban the Bulb' campaign that advocated widely acceptable energy efficiency measures and helped to establish credibility for the organisation in energy policy in India. It also established the 'moral case' for India to take climate action by highlighting the disproportionate impacts of climate change on the Indian poor who contributed the least to the problem, making an argument for intra-generational equity and social justice for the poor, in the same vein as the environmentalism of the poor (see Ananthapadmanabhan et al. 2007).

On the other hand, under the twin effects of the Australian government's lack of action on climate change and its increasing coal usage, the Australian environmental movement strategically transformed into a national anti-coal movement. Due to a range of reasons – impacts on health from pollution, water and effects on farmlands, and concerns about climate change – discontents against coal have been growing in coal mining regions such as the Hunter Valley in New South Wales during the coal boom that started from the early 2000s.

The failure of the international climate talks at Copenhagen in 2009 also coincided with the failure of the Kevin Rudd Labor government to pass climate legislation due to the divisive nature of Australian politics on the issue. This caused a disappointment amongst large ENGOs and professional climate networks that relied on lobbying and advocacy approaches, leading to a systematic turn by organisations at all levels – the national, state, and local – towards strategies for a direct disruption of coal mining and exports. In the process, the environment movement was transformed from a largely formalised network of professional

ENGOS to a diverse network where grassroots and local anti-coal groups played a significant role.

The difference between a national anti-coal climate movement in Australia versus the lack of a mass mobilisation on climate change or explicitly linking the issues of coal extraction and climate change in mass-scale movements in India reflects different imperatives, that are defined by the material, political and social contexts from which the movements are generated.

9.5.2. Negotiating the political economy of coal

The two anti-coal movements encountered similar patterns of power and state prioritisation of coal companies over the public interest. In India, Greenpeace negotiated the controversy and power-play over the allocation of the Mahan coal block within the highest levels of the Indian government. The timeline of the anti-coal movement coincided with an unprecedented increase in India's coal and thermal power generation. This followed policy changes that allowed privatisation and economic planning that were expected to double India's coal energy production. This prioritisation of coal expansion created divisions between the federal environment ministry and those of coal, power and finance, specifically on the issue of allocating coal mines in forests. The Mahan coal block was at the centre of 'Coalgate', the largest government corruption scandal. Coalgate exposed the challenges in transparency and resource management within India's political culture of crony capitalism, constituted as a narrow alliance of business and political elites (Sarma 2013).

The anti-coal campaigns' intervention into Mahan's coal politics exposed favouritism in the allocation of the coal block, the power of coal companies over the government, which also included personal relations and favours, ecological costs (through the destruction of forests), and questioned the public good in the controversial project. The inter-ministerial conflict over the allocation of the Mahan coal block epitomised the flawed mechanism behind India's coal boom. Greenpeace's role in exposing the corruption and mobilising a grassroots

resistance to against the coal mine led to legal attacks from the company, and eventually a crackdown on its campaigns by the Indian government.

In Australia, the Stop Adani movement grew out of and strengthened an existing national anti-coal mobilisation. After massive port developments along the Great Barrier Reef were either cancelled or their proposals drastically reduced due to a withdrawal of investors because of both the structural decline of coal and the divestment campaign, the anti-coal national movement consolidated its fight against megamines in the Galilee Basin in Central Queensland, and specifically Australia's largest proposed coal mine, the Carmichael coal mine.

The coal sector has received special treatment from Australian governments over decades. During the minerals boom, the scale of coal projects and the extent of investment from foreign mining corporations into coal mining played a role in deepening coal's power over Australian governments. Central Queensland became Australia's largest coal-producing region and the state of Queensland weakened environmental regulations and fast-tracked project approvals to facilitate massive coal projects.

The first of the Galilee projects received final approvals between 2012 and 2014. These megamines were anticipated to begin production well after the Paris Agreement had been signed. The coal mines were also slated to begin production at a time when coal's structural decline was making it financially risky to open new coal mines. The national Stop Adani movement thereby exposed coal's power over Australian politics. The Carmichael coal mine finally commenced at a drastically reduced scale and after a delay of five years. It was propped up by political support regardless of its proven economic unviability.

Therefore, to summarise this subsection, despite similarities in the entrenched power of coal over the state in both India and Australia, the case of the 'Coalgate' scandal in India stands out as an extreme case of corruption and undemocratic resource governance, and points to the different scale of challenge in achieving

transparency and accountability in resource governance between Northern and Southern coal democracies.

9.5.3. A national climate versus forests campaign

Both the Stop Adani and Mahan cases reflect a multi-scalar politics and narrative. In the case of Stop Adani, the national mobilisation was driven by mass concern over climate action, while in Queensland the water allocations for the Carmichael coal mine equally mobilised public outrage. The Mahan movement in India was driven by the demand for forest rights on the ground, while the national solidarity for Greenpeace and the anti-coal campaign after the government crackdown was framed under the umbrella of democratic dissent. Between the reports produced by Greenpeace Australia (GP 2012a,b) and Greenpeace India (Fernandes 2012), which mapped out the scale and extent of the problem of new coal developments in the Galilee Basin and in central India respectively, can be seen the significantly different ways in which new coal developments were politicised in Australia and India.

India's national political context on coal significantly differs from that of Australia where governments' have ideologically championed coal exports, discouraged renewables and denying climate change. The Indian government has pursued both ambitious targets for renewables energy development and an increase in domestic coal production in an apparent bid to end dependency on imported coal. The rapid growth of renewables is not displacing coal's central role in the economy, and the government anticipates coal will dominate the energy mix into the near future (Roy and Schaffartzik 2021).

Greenpeace India's report highlights the discrepancy between India putting forward the role of its forests as carbon sinks at international climate forums and independent research data showing that old growth forests in central India were being 'diverted' at a significant rate in order to increase coal and thermal power production. It also highlights the social and ecological risks associated with an expansion of coal mining in old growth forests in central India – encroachment into

national parks, damage to ecosystems and water, impacts on wildlife, the impact on GHG emissions from the destruction of carbon sinks, and the burning of coal, and most significantly, impacts on forest-dwelling communities.

The report pointed out that given the possibility that many of these coal mines may never go into production due to coal's structural decline, the coal mine allocations by the government effectively resulted in a large-scale handover of forest-lands to corporations. Although Greenpeace's anti-coal campaign in Mahan reflected the ENGOs new global approach towards tackling the issue of climate change by stopping coal extraction, the organisation aligned its Indian strategy with the peoples' movement concerns by making forest rights for central-Indian communities a core campaign issue.

The Greenpeace Australia report on the Galilee details the impacts of coal mining in the Galilee Basin on the Great Barrier Reef, underground water sources on which farmers rely, freshwater springs sacred to the W&J, and the local ecology. Most significantly, it provides a calculation of the GHG emissions that would be produced from burning coal extracted from all of the Galilee mines, highlighting the risk these emissions posed to the global climate. Since 'scope three' emissions – produced from burning Australia coal in overseas thermal power plants – do not count towards its domestic emissions, allowing governments to continue promoting coal exports without being required to assume responsibility for its impacts on the global climate, attempting to disrupt Australia's coal exports appeared the only way to challenge Australia's leading role in global pollution from coal burning. This defined the purpose of the Stop Adani movement, and it aimed to Stop the Carmichael coal mine as the first step in that process.

To summarise the difference in the social reality within which the Indian and Australian anti-coal environmental campaigns operated, extensive coal mining in the Southern context, apart from causing widespread ecological destruction, also critically impacts on human rights. Unlike the Australian campaign where the scientific risks of climate change was a central issue that sparked mass

mobilisations and public outrage, in the Indian case, the focus remained on the implications of the destruction of forests on forest-dwelling communities.

9.5.4. Pro-coal and anti-democratic government actions

Civil society in both countries interpreted the pro-coal actions of governments as anti-democratic measures, although their contexts and narratives differed.

The assertion of democracy as a campaign narrative could be seen very strongly in the Indian case. The high profile crackdown on Greenpeace by the Narendra Modi government became a flashpoint in Indian society for a discussion on the discontents of coal. Against the wider context of crackdowns on civil society groups and people's movements in 2014, the court interpreted the actions of the anti-coal movement as a critical act of dissent in a democracy. As noted in Chapter 4, the movement's actions were seen as critical for questioning the dominant development paradigm that excluded the perspectives of marginalised communities, despite their special protection under the Constitution, signifying anti-coal activism as a constitutional right.

In Australia, demands by environmental groups that governments stop supporting coal projects that lacked 'the social license to operate' and instead act on climate change that most Australians wanted, essentially implied democratic accountability by the state. ENGOs and think tanks have pointed to how political donations from fossil fuel corporations is affecting government decision making and action on climate change and finally the quality of Australian democracy (see Chapter 6 and 7, also Australian Conservation Foundation n.d.). The 'climate wars' in Australian politics, particularly the removal of Kevin Rudd from the position of prime minister by vested interests against climate action, signified how fossil-fuel interests had hijacked Australian democracy.

9.5.5. Risks of anti-coal activism

Both the Indian and Australian anti-coal campaigns faced a backlash from the coal mining corporations and governments. In Australia, various measures attempted by the federal government to restrict campaigning activities against coal in general and the campaign against the Carmichael coal mine in particular included attempts at funding disruption through attacks on the tax-deductibility status of ENGOs, defunding of state-based conservation groups and environmental legal networks. Calling the environmental legal challenges against the Carmichael coal mine 'green sabotage', the Tony Abbott government attempted to repeal section 487 of the EPBC Act, which provides for judicial reviews.

In Queensland, the state police increased its surveillance on direct disruptive actions and anti-coal activists, and the government passed legislation that criminalised protests by banning the use of 'locking devices'. Adani Australia operationalised an aggressive 'attack dog' strategy that threatened legal action against activists. Its retaliation to the W&J set a precedent as the first time that an Australian traditional owner was made bankrupt by a mining company (Gregoire 2019). The legal persecution of a Queensland based grassroots activist, who the company has accused of alleged conspiracy, has also sparked concerns amongst Australian journalists about the consequences of reporting sensitive stories about the Carmichael project (Smee 2020).

In India, Essar Power aimed to bankrupt Greenpeace through a A\$100 million strategic lawsuit against public participation (SLAPP suit). Local movement members from the MSS faced constant threats and disruptions of their campaign work from local company agents. However, the most significant and consistent attack on the ENGOs operations came from the Indian government under Narendra Modi through the freezing of its bank accounts and the cancellation of its licence to operate in India. This attack on Greenpeace in 2014 came as part of a widespread attack on civil liberties and human rights groups.

The crackdown also targeted international developmental, environmental and human rights NGOs based in India, under the pretext of the misuse of their foreign funding registrations. Greenpeace was singled out in a separate dossier prepared by India's domestic surveillance agency, the Intelligence Bureau, for its anti-coal campaign in Mahan and was alleged to be acting at the behest of foreign governments who wanted to stall India's development. Greenpeace survived the attacks and successfully challenged the government's actions in the courts. However, by January 2019 it had to wind up most of its two-decades-long operations in India following a further freezing of its bank accounts (Talukdar 2019b).

Although the Indian and Australian cases demonstrate similar patterns in governments and corporations attempting to delegitimise and intimidate anti-coal activism, the persistent attacks on Greenpeace because of its Mahan campaign, and its subsequent (near) eradication from India, are an outstanding example of the risks involved in challenging the political economy of coal in a Southern postcolonial context. They also indicate the differences between these Northern and Southern coal democracies.

9.5.6. Tools and forms of mobilisations

The difference in the forms and tools of mobilisation between the Indian and Australian cases indicates a characteristic Northern versus Southern demographic difference in terms of the main actors in environmental campaigns.

The Stop Adani movement had a multi-pronged campaign approach that included a divestment campaign, mass-scale national mobilisations, electoral and local grass-roots mobilisations, as well as peaceful direct disruption tactics at the project site and along the transport corridor. It used a variety of new digital organising platforms and mobilisation tactics, similar to movements against fossil-fuel projects in North America. These platforms and technologies indicate the availability of a critical mass of urban supporters who could be mobilised on the issue. It indicates that Stop Adani, as a Northern environmental movement with a

national and even a global reach, being able to mobilise the resources and access the latest campaigning technologies.

Although Greenpeace in India did use digital mobilisation tactics to target its urban supporters in India, such as when a Greenpeace activist spent a month in a tree house in the central Indian forests to raise awareness about the risk they face from coal mining, given the dominance of the grassroots MSS mobilisation in its anti-coal campaign, its scope for using the latest campaign and organising technologies for urban outreach was significantly limited.

The majority of tactics and mobilisations in the case of the Indian campaign related to the community at Mahan and organising the local resistance there. On-the-ground organising required Greenpeace's Mahan team to be present at the site for most months in the year. Digital technologies could not be accessed in the area due to the lack of both electronic devices amongst most community members and digital connectivity. Communication and campaign promotions mostly depended on one-on-one interactions and word of mouth. Mobility for MSS members was either entirely on foot (in the case of women), or on bicycles, or occasionally on motorcycles. The Greenpeace Mahan team had the only car available for campaign work in the community. Some of the local movement's most prominent actions, such as women protecting trees in the forest from being felled at the peak of the campaign (see Chapter 5), resonate with iconic community struggles to protect forests such as Chipko (discussed in Chapter 2), and reflect the timelessness of what Scott (1985) calls the 'weapons of the weak' that environmentalism of the poor deploys.

9.6. Contributions to Political Ecology

This section summarises how the thesis has applied and contributed to the political ecological framework and its relevance for further research on climate activism. The following paragraphs discuss how the case study chapters have built on existing political ecological texts and addressed known gaps in the literature through their representation and analysis of the research findings.

Chapters 1 and 2 discussed *Varieties of Environmentalism: Essays North and South* (Guha and Martinez-Alier 1997) whose methodological approach – that of conceptualising different environmental resistances by delineating their social, political, economic and environmental context – were relevant to this thesis. While this text served as a scholarly response to the hegemony of Northern environmentalism and delineated several Southern environmentalisms (see discussion in Chapter 2), this thesis both shares its intent and has built on it by bringing the concept of various environmentalisms into today's climate activism. The dissertation has similarly built on central texts in Indian environmentalism (discussed in Chapter 2) by bringing the global climate change issue into dialogue with grassroots and historic disaffections. It has also introduced the dimensions of multi-scalar politics and multiple non-state actors at conflict sites. It has contributed to First World Political Ecology by bringing a current anti-coal resistance in a settler colonial society into dialogue with colonisation and industrialisation that has reshaped its geography, through tracing the state's historic relation with the different anti-coal actors.

The Indian (3,4,5) and Australian (6,7,8) case study chapters are organised around a central analysis of the state and governance regimes across multiple scales – the international, national, regional and local – both during the comparable timeframes of neoliberal development and minerals boom respectively, as well as historically. In Chapters 3 and 6, this approach has helped to anchor the question and analysis of how environmentalisms have transformed from their previous versions in considerations of how entire places have been transformed by neoliberal resource extraction through the support of the state while community rights have been neglected. Equally importantly, this line of analysis has helped to discuss prominent political trends that had crucial bearing on the movement narratives and politics, such as the politics surrounding land rights and the decade of climate inaction in Australia between 2007 and 2017, and dilution of the progressive legislations LARR and FRA and increasing crackdown on civil society in India since 2014.

In Chapters 4 and 7, tracing the historical arc of coal-led growth and the state's central role, has established fundamental differences between the neoliberal versus developmental paradigms of the Australian versus Indian states. It has also highlighted similarities in the patterns and processes of favouring coal developments, especially against today's realities of worsening climate change and decreasing economic viability of coal. A characteristic North-South difference in environmentalism can also be observed through the state-based analysis: that despite similar state patterns in facilitating coal development, the activism has turned on fundamentally different imperatives, one dominantly on the big picture science of climate change, and the other on livelihood rights, indicating two very different societies. Through a central focus on the state, chapters 5 and 8 have qualified how cumulative state actions since the colonial period have shaped the context around which the current site-based conflicts are playing out, making evident the historicity and the marginality of local actors and their claims.

The state-centred approach to analysing the case studies addresses a known gap in political ecological literature which has 'kept circling state theory without fully engaging with it' (Loftus 2018, p. 140) by engaging various conceptualisations of the state. The case study chapters have analysed settler colonial development particularly in Queensland and the effects of the neoliberalising political economy and resource curse on Australian politics, and conceptualisations of the postcolonial developmental state and its transformation under neoliberalism in India. But these concepts have failed to adequately justify all state behaviours: the extent of corruption in the Coalgate coal block allocation scam and violent withholding of community rights in India require a more intricate inspection of crony capitalism and the inherent contradiction in the welfare and developmental roles of postcolonial states; the extent of the resource curse on Australia politics also needs to analyse the dominant influence of the Rupert Murdoch owned NewsCorp news media on climate politics. Further comparative studies both across the North and South and within similar contexts (North-North or South-South) can help to further delineate similar patterns and nuanced differences in captured state behaviours.

Several earlier political ecological texts have studied ecological changes at sites through interactions of political and economic processes along the vertical scale of the local, regional, national and international (see Blaikie and Brookfield 1987). Rangan and Kull's (2009) argument about the need for research that focuses on how scale is being used to politicise ecological change is directly relevant for climate activism's new strategy to politicise climate change through grounding it in local coal-extraction while also scaling up grassroots anti-coal resistances as climate justice movements. Scalar politics of states versus counter-scaling politics of resistance movements emerged as analytical themes through the interpretation of research results in both cases. The treatment of the Galilee Basin and Singrauli as sacrifice zones indicates the state's assertion of coal's significance along the vertical scalar geographies of the region, state and nation. But mobilisations in both countries attempted to reconfigure this paradigm by building alliances across these territorial boundaries. The notion of Hunter Valley as Carbon Valley and the Carmichael coal mine as a carbon bomb indicate a simultaneous scalar movement towards grounding climate change and globalising coal extraction. Although climate change did not play a similar mobilising role in India, Mahan's anti-coal struggle for forest rights was scaled up as a critical assertion of democracy from the ground through nationwide civil society support.

Finally, since political ecology traces the long arc of industrialisation and its eco-social effects, it has allowed this research to establish continuity by tracing the colonial-industrial origins of today's climate crisis, and to make Indigenous people's historical disenfranchisement by colonial capitalism relevant in their present struggles against coal extraction. This framework has therefore proven effective for the goal of this thesis to understand how climate activism can achieve common ground both across and within geographies with struggles of historically marginalised peoples. How this thesis has approached political ecology sets a strong example for future comparative research on climate justice activism.

9.7. A global outlook for environmentalism

Global climate activism is now focussed on keeping fossil fuels in the ground, aiming to facilitate the transition of economies toward renewable energy by also facilitating a transition away from fossil fuels. This approach implies that the actions of environmental activists now directly impact the political economy of fossil fuels, and their politics and activism is a part of the national energy politics of fossil-fuel dependent nations. Essentially, the new approach of environmentalism challenges the existing model of extractivist economic development. Since the politics of the new approach is predicated on forming solidarities with local struggles against fossil fuel projects, global climate activism's aims and vision are now entangled with those of communities at the front line of extractive projects.

This thesis has analysed two anti-coal resistances in two coal-led economies, one in the Northern context of Australia and one in the Southern context of India. It has examined how the anti-coal activism of the Stop Adani movement has affected the political debate on climate and energy in Australia, how its activism has targeted the political, economic and infrastructural structures of the coal economy through a multi-pronged campaign including divestment, national mass mobilisations, grassroots and electorate-level local actions, and peaceful direct disruptions of the coal project. It has investigated the relational politics of the environmental movement with local farmers against coal mining, and its relationship with the campaign for land rights of the W&J traditional owners. It has discussed what narrative and politics their collective resistance has generated in Australian politics and society, and what this collective movement means for environmental activism in Australia.

The thesis has also examined how the anti-coal activism of Greenpeace India has affected the political debate on climate and energy in India, and how its activism have symbolically (rather than substantially) targeted the political, economic and infrastructural structures of the coal economy through a multi-level campaign that included exposing state-corporate collusion in destroying the India's old growth forests, urban mobilisations, and a significant community mobilisation at the

proposed mine site. Based on an ethnographic approach, the research phase of this study investigated the relationship between the ENGO and the local community at Mahan, and how through the process of their interactions they negotiated a shared significance and narrative for their collective action. Through an examination of the civil society debate about the value of anti-coal activism in India, the case study has analysed the significance of the anti-coal movement for environmentalism in India and its democratic debate.

The two case studies offer some insights about the elements of the new environmentalism. This chapter has thematically discussed the parallels and distinctions between the two contexts, and between the movements, their politics, narratives and relationships. I will now provide an overview of the comparative analyses of the two activisms through a table.

9.7.1. Comparative table of anti-coal activism and their contexts

Issue	Patterns and differences	Significance for a global outlook of environmental activism?
NGOs/environmentalists		
Anti-coal campaigns	In Australia, the issue of the Adani coal mine was dominantly framed as a climate change problem; in India, the issue around the Mahan coal mine was dominantly framed around the forest rights of communities and assertion of democratic rights	This indicates social and political differences and a difference between the Northern and Southern contexts of coal and climate change politics.
Green-Indigenous relations	Sovereignty was a key factor in the W&J-Green relations in Australia; the W&J ran their own international campaign and strategically collaborated with environmental groups. In India, the Mahan community's awareness about forest rights and mobilisation against the coal mine was strongly influenced by Greenpeace.	This cannot be considered a characteristic North-South difference in Indigenous mobilisations, but it does point to the availability of resources, platform and visibility for Northern Indigenous groups in comparison with Southern communities.
Governments		
Responding to ENGO campaigns	Both governments retaliated to environmentalists' anti-coal campaigns. However the scale of retaliation differed, with the Indian government's crackdown on Greenpeace	The difference in the state of civil society and protest effectively indicates a difference in the state of democracy

	standing out as an extreme measure.	between Australia and India.
Indigenous consent for mining	Both governments colluded with mining corporations to manufacture Indigenous consent for coalmining. Both governments also amended and diluted Indigenous rights legislations in favour of mining corporations. However the extent to which state governments in India violate the Forest Rights Act stands out as an extreme measure	This difference in the state of Indigenous rights by extension also indicates a difference in the state of democracy in between Australia and India.
State-corporate nexus and pro-coal actions	Both governments demonstrated special treatments towards mining corporations, and a strong support for coal. Civil society groups deemed such actions as undemocratic. Once again, the scale of government corruption in the management of coal blocks in India stands out as an exceptional case of 'crony-capitalism'	This difference once again indicates a difference in the state of democracy between Australia and India, between accountability and transparency in the governance of natural resources.
Climate politics	Unlike Australia's climate-denialist politics, India positions itself as a supporter of climate action. However the government's strong support for coal mining makes its pro-climate approach paradoxical.	The Indian government's support for climate action therefore does not generate the same political imperative for mobilisation on the climate issue as in Australia.

Table 9.7.1: Anti-coal activism and their contexts in India and Australia compared.

The analysis in table 9.7.1 on the earlier page points towards some possibilities for conceiving a shared outlook and understanding of climate activism, and more specifically, of anti-coal activism globally. As well, by highlighting significant distinctions across the North and the South, the thesis.

9.7.2. Common ground in North-South environmentalism?

The new approach of environmentalism has led to an entanglement of the politics of climate activism with other actors such as farmers, Indigenous groups, and livelihood communities. In Australia, the earlier fundamental mismatches of vision between Indigenous and environmental groups and the hostilities between farmers and environmentalists have been transformed towards an overarching claim for climate justice under which multiple notions of justice are sustained. However, global activism's interweaving with community grievances in India has produced a different political narrative. The critical nature of human rights violations involved in the denial of forest rights and land dispossessions, and the difference in the way coal is politicised by civil societies across India and Australia, as seen through the case studies, bring into perspective differences related to Northern and Southern environmentalism today.

However, common ground can be found in the similar patterns of power of the coal sector over governments. Politicisations based on climate change in Australia and democratic dissent in India point to a difference in the social politics of coal in these two dissimilar societies. But similar patterns in the state's actions and responses in both cases indicate the persistence of a contentious political culture around coal that is sustained by a nexus between coal corporations and governments (Brown and Spiegel 2019). Both campaigns were shaped by and responded to the international divisions constructed by the respective agendas of national developmentalism that are driven by coal – carbon discounting for export coal by the Australian government and a postcolonial antagonism towards

international scrutiny of its environmental and human rights track-record related to coal developments by the Indian government.

Because of the entanglement of coal with the political economy of Australia and India, the anti-coal activism was deemed as a risk to the economy and the national interest, and both campaigns were accused of being anti-national and anti-development (see Chapters 4 and 7; Talukdar 2018b). Although more prominently seen in India, in both cases, civil society reinterpreted the significance of the anti-coal activism as democratic actions, against the context of undue government support for coal mining and favouring coal corporations over the rights of people.

Common ground can also be found in the similar processes and roles of governments in exacerbating ecological conflicts by favouring mining corporations. For communities who find themselves on the frontline of land and resource-related conflicts arising from mining – Adivasis and peasant communities in India and Indigenous native title groups, farmers and local communities near extractive zones in Australia – these risks increased significantly during the resource boom and the neoliberalised rapid industrialisation in Australia and India respectively. Therefore, despite social, economic and historic differences amongst these actors and their contexts, tracing their pathway of mobilisation as a long-term build up of grievances due to structural disenfranchisement by the state's prioritisation of resource extraction, particularly coal mining, revealed points of convergence.

India's neoliberal economic development has increased land-conflicts, and a consequent irruption of social protests has compelled governments to pass ameliorative measures such as the Forest Rights Act. In Australia, farmers emerged as a marginalised constituency from increased coal mining that put fertile farmlands at risk, although their social grievances have been growing due to a prioritisation of mining over agriculture from the 1980s. Indigenous groups had bargaining power with mining corporations due to the Native Title Act, and this

capability also helped them to forge more empowered relationships with environmentalists to resist coal mining projects (see chapters 3 and 6).

Understanding the procedural and distributive injustices towards the different movement actors added depth to the ethnographic comparison of the two anti-coal movement cases. This method of comparison, of tracing the structural build-up of anti-coal protests and the procedural marginalisation of disaffected communities that join in resistance against coal mining, is also effective for identifying points of convergence across the disparities while comparing a Northern and a Southern case.

9.7.3. Emphasis on human rights and land rights?

Knowledge about the potential impacts of climate change, and of increasing human vulnerabilities from climate destruction, has made human rights central to the concept of climate justice. It has made questions about how to secure critical human rights and constitutional rights – to survival, to livelihood, right to a healthy environment and freedom from fear of ecological destruction – central to demands for climate justice (Skillington 2017). Concern for climate change is being increasingly expressed in environmental litigation against governments and fossil-fuel corporations by evoking such human rights (Preston 2018). In addition, the concerning scale of global violence against environmental activists and Indigenous land defenders point to the need for research to document the logic and effects of human rights violations in environmental conflicts and help assess protection measures (Feng et al. 2020).

Already vulnerable Indigenous and subsistence-based communities who are also fighting coal extraction, experience human rights violations and anthropogenic violence on both these scales. Indigenous experiences of anthropogenic climate change can be complicated, and can often be centred on the experience of being harmed by the fossil-fuel industry (Whyte 2017). The new approach of environmentalism, predicated on solidarity with frontline communities, can focus on systemic and structural causes for human rights violations in the fossil-fuel

political economy. It can broaden and deepen the grounds of its advocacy to ensure that the post-carbon and renewables-powered society it envisions do not replicate the systemic human rights concerns of fossil-fuel regimes. The findings from the Australian and Indian cases in this thesis offer insights in this direction.

By exposing the violation of forest rights and its poor implementation, the Greenpeace Mahan campaign brought a human rights issue for Adivasi and forest-dwelling communities to the fore. Its campaign strategy at Mahan was centred on the aim to help the community to exercise their historic rights over the forests. Beyond the immediate need to stop the coal mine, the question of securing forest-dependent livelihoods and strengthening community forest rights became a focus for the Mahan community. Paradoxically, this vital engagement by the ENGO also became the reason for its political persecution, due to the sensitivity of the Indian government to issues of energy security, and so-called interference of international NGOS. The documentation of the violation of forest rights at Mahan, the risks and intimidations to the local MSS movement, and the government crackdown on Greenpeace, contribute to environmental justice research on human rights violations in environmental conflicts.

In Australia, Stop Adani aligned with the human rights assertions of the W&J, for the redressal of their historic injustice of land dispossession by settler colonialism, and its continuation through mining without consent on their lands. It also aligned with the contestations of farmers whose livelihoods are threatened by climate change and coal extraction. Further, issues of intra-generational equity for climate change, especially those articulated by youth groups and the Climate School Strikes across Australia, are framed as a human rights issue for future generations (Talukdar 2018c). The youth-based climate coalition Youth Verdict has legally challenged the Galilee Basin coal mines on the basis of breach of human rights, particularly the right to life and the cultural rights of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders People (Daly and Douvartzidis 2020).

The issue of land rights is inseparable from the issue of human rights for Indigenous people. Since environmentalism's aims and visions are now entangled

with those of communities at the front line of coal extraction, it could also find alignment with the purpose of land rights and the principles of historic and present land justice, as seen in the two cases in this thesis. An understanding and alignment with land justice could also extend to environmentalism's advocacy on renewables, through environmental activists calling for renewable projects not to replicate the mistakes of the coal complex. In India, renewable projects have already caused similar problems to coal mining projects, particularly land dispossession, livelihood disruption and the inability of local communities to access the electricity generated from the project (Roy and Schaffartzik 2021).

An emphasis on human rights and land rights in the new approach of environmentalism creates a strong element of commonality between Northern and Southern environmentalism. A human and land rights approach as seen in the two cases in this thesis also raises questions about the future of environmental activism's relations with the other actors, and how these relations can continue to transform environmentalism's vision and values:

How can engagements such as between Greenpeace and Mahan sustain beyond halting coal mines, towards a shared vision for a post-carbon society?

How can environmentalist-farmer relations in Australia move beyond relations of convenience against the common risk of coal mining, towards a shared vision for a future beyond coal?

And finally, how can environmentalism both support and centre Indigenous visions and futures in its worldview, beyond what has been achieved temporarily through tactical Green-Black alliances in Australia against the extraction of coal and other minerals?

9.7.4. What does a global outlook signify?

Coal cannot be merely reduced to an abstract status as 'carbon'. Communities impacted by coal extraction experience and express various discontents with coal.

Apart from various natural resources-related conflicts arising from coal mining, for communities, discontents can also be due to historical processes of land-dispossession (and their continuation in the present era) and systematic disenfranchisement by the state that favours extractive-accumulation through coal (Brown and Spiegel 2019).

Environmentalism's entanglement with community-level anti-coal concerns has exposed it to a variety of grievances associated with distributive and procedural injustices, making it possible for it to address additional facets of climate risk beyond the 'melting of the ice', and additional facets of climate justice by considering 'how and for whose concern justice might be applied' (Forsyth 2014, p. 232). An inclusion of the diverse priorities of frontline communities impacted by coal conflicts, and especially including significantly different contexts and conditions as indicated through the North-South comparison in this thesis, can help to better attune the global outlook of environmentalism, so that some people's concerns are not overlooked or their problems exacerbated.

Unpacking the politics of coal in diverse regional contexts is necessary to draw attention to the lived experiences of communities that are more often than not left out the framing of energy transition debates that are crucial to today's environmentalism (Brown and Spiegel 2019). Particularly Indigenous and peasant populations in the South fighting coal extraction face three kinds of injustices: not only are they vulnerable to climate impacts and the effects of coalmining on their lands, they also lack access to electricity, the very commodity that coal produces (Talukdar 2017). Due to a socio-economic unevenness, the priorities of such communities can significantly differ from those that are fighting coal extraction in the Global North. Such differences need to be understood and included to expand the field of justice on the issue of climate change and coal.

Such imperatives underscore the relevance of this thesis in attempting to delineate a global perspective of environmentalism's new approach that represents disparate contexts. Through a systematic comparison of a Northern and a Southern case of anti-coal activism, and a discussion of their similarities and differences, this

thesis makes the case for a global approach that is inclusive. The two cases demonstrate the difference in the social and political significance of climate change in India and Australia. Due to the difference in the national politics on coal and climate change, the national anti-coal campaigns were differently strategized in India and Australia. The campaigns also reflect characteristic differences between Northern and Southern environmentalisms with the former tending to focus on big picture issues and the latter being grounded in the material concerns of ecosystems communities.

The two cases also demonstrate different social and political tendencies towards explicitly linking coal and climate change. These are once again determined in response to the respective national politics. In India, various civil society organisation (CSO) actors support the common but differentiated principle (CBRD) in global responsibility sharing on GHG emissions, expecting the West to do more to mitigate the problem. Political risks involved in the sectoral-targeting of energy resources, particularly coal, acts as a deterrent for CSOs to adopt a directly confrontational approach towards coal projects.

The cases also demonstrate the unevenness of democracies in the two countries. This is most significantly demonstrated through the extent of the 'Coalgate' corruption scandal that raised very critical concerns about the issue of transparency and resource governance, especially coal, in India, and the extent of the crack down on civil society groups including Greenpeace, that exposed the crisis of human rights in India. It is also demonstrated through the poor implementation and the violation of the Forest Rights Act.

Therefore, from the perspective of a North-South divide that still persists in environmentalism due to various factors mentioned above and discussed through the cases, a global outlook of environmentalism signifies an approach that considers its various dimensions and inter-relations, and critically, both the North and the South equally, rather than assuming or aiming for a homogeneity of worldviews.

9.8. Recommendation for further research

Environmental and climate justice research needs to recognise the possibility of entirely different contexts and concepts of ecological justice emerging from the South. International climate activism can acknowledge that the multiple and urgent nature of human justice issues in the South result in climate often being used as a proxy issue by campaigns in the South to link with the global movement and its narratives. The Southern context puts a critical mass of human justice issues on to a global platform of climate and environmental activism, and through its socio-economic complexities it challenges the relatively 'neat' framing of issues from the North.

Climate justice research can consider more such in-depth comparisons of anti-fossil fuel resistances between the North and South to further delineate the diversity of approaches to global climate activism. While governments continue to support fossil fuel projects even with advancing climate change, resistances 'from the ground up' to fossil fuel projects, consisting of communities who are more often than not left out of policy considerations, are asserting their voices in debates on energy transition and energy justice. The North-South comparative framework of environmentalism research, that acknowledges the difference between cases being compared from industrialised versus industrialising socio-economic contexts (amongst others in a North-South comparison) can be effective for the qualitative and in-depth comparison of diversity in global grassroots uprisings facing similar challenges of fossil fuels extraction and its effects on their lands and natural resources (Peluso and Watts 2001; Taylor 1995). Building up a systematic body of such comparative ethnographic research can complement the research scholarship of global projects such as the Global Atlas of Environment Justice (<https://ejatlas.org>), a global database of environmental conflicts and resistances that serves as a valuable tool for activists and researchers, by providing an in-depth understanding of critical similarities and differences in grassroots mobilisations on similar issues.

9.9. Conclusion

Community struggles at sites of fossil fuel extraction have been an ongoing feature in both the global North and the South. However, since 2009, environmental and climate groups in the global North, and international activist networks, have been increasingly politicising fossil fuel extraction. Community struggles might not explicitly challenge coal as a fossil fuel, but for the deleterious effects of its extraction on the lands, livelihoods and cultures of those communities. Through its new approach of ‘cutting carbon from the ground up’, global environmental activism’s politics and narratives have become entangled with that of other actors such as farmers, Indigenous groups, and subsistence based communities.

This relational politics, and the co-generation of a broader, shared significance of stopping coal-extraction, and justice from coal extraction, has proved transformative for environmental activism. This thesis has generated a set of comparisons from two different contexts in which globally oriented climate and environmental groups have worked in alliance with communities to cut carbon from the ground up. The two case studies demonstrate collective meaning making from resisting coal across two disparate contexts. The new relational politics of environmental activism also points to the need to go beyond the urgent purpose of stopping coal extraction in alliance with these communities, towards collectively envisioning alternative futures beyond fossil fuels that are ecologically and socially just.

Targeting of coal extraction has also brought the national political economies of energy-development under the purview of environmental activism. This has brought environmental activism into direct conflict with issues of energy security and the national interest. This aspect of activism’s new approach has been a consistent theme for comparison in this thesis. The anti-coal activism in both India and Australia have challenged coal’s power at various scales from the local to the global, and in the process provoked a backlash from governments that have deemed these campaigns as risks to the national economic interest, regardless of

coal's structural decline. The entrenched power of the fossil fuel sector has often hijacked the ability of governments to move away from fossil fuel extractive projects, despite global market withdrawals and the decreasing costs of renewables. Governments in coal producing countries around the globe have followed the contradictory policy tracks of agreeing to emissions reductions while simultaneously expanding coal production.

This thesis provides a timely comparison of environmental activist campaigns of stopping coal extraction. Solidarity with communities at the frontline of coal-extraction, and a disruption of the coal-economy at multiple-scales together constitute a new template for this environmental activism, which aims to 'cut carbon from the ground up' by halting the extraction of unburnable fuels. The thesis has compared the activism that this new template of global environmentalism has generated in the Northern context of Australia and the Southern context of India. It has highlighted differences and their underlying causes between the two cases, as well as demonstrated the patterns of similarities.

Such a comparison brings a representative and global understanding as to how climate and environmental activist groups are deploying this new approach, and the range of different environmental meanings and politics that are being co-generated through alliances with front line communities resisting coal extraction. Drawing on and elaborating the themes identified through a discussion on literatures in Chapter 2, and based on findings from the two case studies in Chapters 3-8, this final chapter has interwoven the various elements and dimensions of the Indian and Australian anti-coal activism, suggest what a global outlook for 'cutting carbon from the ground up' could look like.

The distinctiveness in the national environmental campaigns between Australia and India, the former framed on climate change and the latter on forest rights and democracy, point to socio-political differences around large-scale mobilisation on the issue of climate change, as well as the predominantly community and grassroots-level focus of the majority of environmental mobilisations in India. Parallels can be drawn between the W&J's land resistance in Australia, and the

forest-dwelling Mahan community's resistance to coal mining on their lands on the basis of the state-corporate collusion in both cases, for manufacturing Indigenous consent to mining, and state's dilution of Indigenous rights legislations to favour coal mining corporations. These findings offer insights for activists and researchers.

There is a strong resonance between the anti-coal activisms in Australia and India, and the shared meanings they generate with their non-environmentalist movement allies, on the basis of an emphasis on human rights and land rights of Indigenous people. This convergence constitutes a fundamental common ground between Northern and Southern disparities in environmental activisms' new campaign, and deepening and strengthening this emphasis holds distinct possibilities for its politics and advocacy on energy transition. Through an emphasis on human and land rights issues, global activism can offer a systemic critique of the fossil fuel regime in both Northern and Southern contexts that is underpinned by justice as well as the impacts of colonialism and capitalism on Indigenous communities.

Under pressure from global climate activism, particularly the campaign for divestment from fossil fuels, and withdrawal of investors from coal extraction and thermal power projects, governments in countries with coal-driven political economies could likely demonstrate increasing (albeit faux) anxieties around coal-driven energy-security. The collective resistances of environmentalists and local community actors signify a necessary politics to shift the discussion on energy transition by directly intervening to facilitate the end of coal. Since communities fighting coal extraction on the front line are usually the ones left out of policy decision-making, the purpose of their alliance with environmentalists can extend beyond the immediate necessity of stopping coal extraction, towards co-generating post-carbon economic alternatives.

Appendices

Appendix 1 - Fieldwork in India

Semi-structured interviews

I conducted 22 semi-structured interviews in India between 2017 and 2018. Seven of these were with Greenpeace staff, six with local movement leaders in Singrauli, and nine with other civil society actors based in New Delhi. I selected the non-Greenpeace and non-Mahan interviewees from a network of activists, researchers, lawyers and journalists I am familiar with, based on my background in environmental activism in India.

I conducted an initial set of three interviews with civil society actors at the beginning of my fieldwork in March 2017 – with the coordinator of a national research and advocacy network for alternative development, a senior researcher from a national policy research institute, and a senior environmental lawyer. All three have had an association with Greenpeace; the first was the chair of Greenpeace India's board, the second had been involved in the initial scoping and research for the Mahan campaign, and the third had represented cases for Greenpeace in India's environmental court, the National Green Tribunal (NGT).

Their responses guided me in shaping the research's broader approach – of analysing how neoliberalism in India's development from the mid-1990s has transformed environmental activism in India – in order to interpret the new politics, and the significance, of the anti-coal movement of Greenpeace and the local Mahan Sangharsh Samiti ('Mahan resistance front'). Their responses also highlighted the central role played by the state in these transformations. The non-Greenpeace and non-Mahan interviews also helped to understand how other civil society actors perceived the significance of the Greenpeace-Mahan Sanghash Samiti (MSS) anti-coal resistance across the regional and national scales. I used an open-ended questionnaire that attempted to understand the characteristics of the environmentalism of the poor in neoliberal era, and the significance of the Mahan anti-coal movement within this broader context.

Between June and August 2017, I conducted six other interviews with civil society actors, which added depth to the findings from the first three interviews. One was with an anti-nuclear activist, who discussed the common tactics used by governments to repress people's movements against energy projects. Another was with a senior energy policy analyst who offered perspective on India's massive coal-developments from 2004, and their economic, social and ecological risks. The third interview was with a senior investigative journalist who covers the political economy of energy in India, and provided perspectives on the state-corporate nexus. The energy analyst and the journalist were also board members of Greenpeace India. The fourth, fifth and sixth interviews were also with senior journalists, who cover the areas of climate, energy, and environmental management. They offered perspectives on the dilution of environmental regulations and legal provisions for community rights, and restrictions on environmental reporting, since the Modi government's term beginning in 2014.

Participant observation and semi-structured interviews at Greenpeace

I also started my Indian fieldwork with participant observation in the Greenpeace office in New Delhi, where I spent 12 days observing various campaign meetings and discussions. Although Greenpeace is headquartered in Bangalore, the team involved with the Mahan campaign was based in New Delhi. I familiarized myself with the current campaign areas, particularly the Climate and Energy (C&E) program within which the Mahan campaign was located, and the current organizational structure through informal conversations with Greenpeace staff. Greenpeace had had to shrink its campaign activities and reduce staffing after the government crackdown in 2015. At the time of my fieldwork it was still challenging the Indian government's actions through multiple legal cases. I was asked to sign a confidentiality agreement when I started my observations, and I have made sure not to mention any internal campaign information in this thesis in compliance with Greenpeace's requirement.

The core Greenpeace team working on the Mahan campaign, referred as the Greenpeace Mahan team in this thesis, included two campaigners, a communications advisor, and two community engagement officers. This team also spent several months during the year in the new Greenpeace office in the town of Waidhan, in the

Singrauli district in the central Indian state of Madhya Pradesh. Waidhan is also the closest town to the villages in the Mahan forests that were involved in the local resistance. Amelia, the largest village, is located 50 kilometers from Waidhan. Greenpeace set up its Waidhan office in 2010 specifically for the Mahan campaign.

I conducted a total of seven semi-structured interviews with Greenpeace staff, five of them with the Greenpeace Mahan team, the sixth with the Climate and Energy Program Manager, and the seventh with Greenpeace India's Communications Manager. The interviews focused on the Mahan movement's timeline, its key events, build-ups and strategic interventions by Greenpeace to government policies and actions, and the relevance of the grassroots Mahan movement to Greenpeace globally.

Field visits in Mahan

Between 2017 and 2018, I visited Mahan four times and spent a total of eight weeks, along with the Greenpeace team. During my first visit in 2017, I experienced the community's second anniversary celebrations of the victory over coal mining in their local forest. The event gave me a sense of the spirit of the movement and the alliance between forest-dependent village locals and urban-based Greenpeace activists. During my second visit in 2017 I was able to observe the community's forest-dependency in a more in-depth manner, and hold extended interactions and interviews with the six movement leaders. The interviews with the local leaders focused on their biographical accounts of joining the resistance. During my third and fourth visits in 2018 I had a chance to witness dialogues between Greenpeace and the community about the future of the movement, and initial conversations about establishing an alternative livelihood-based model (to coal mining) based on the collection of mahua flowers and tendu leaves from the forest by community members, and establishing a secure market for these forest products.

Although the coalmine had been stopped two years before my fieldwork, the tension between the company and local authorities on the one hand and the radicalized locals on the other still existed, allowing me to 'relive' and 'imagine' the spirit of the resistance, and 'to capture fluid, shifting conditions' (Plows 2008) that would have been the essence of the movement's everyday life. An observation of the community's

daily life, including their seasonal gathering of mahua flowers and tendu leaves in the forests, helped me to provide thick and specific descriptions of the forest-dependency of the community. Observing the daily lives of the women of Mahan highlighted the central role the forests played in helping them run their households, by providing fuel for cooking and grazing grounds for their cattle.

A focus on the daily life in Mahan also highlighted the intimidating tactics of the local administration and local company officials, factors that had played a major role in radicalizing the community against the coal mining. Since a visible protest is just the tip of the iceberg (Plows 2008) in the multi-layered social context of a mining-affected rural community such as Mahan, the visits gave me enough material to trace how and under what imperatives the local movement had emerged. As far as fitting in goes, my non-native, broken Hindi speech did not ultimately come in the way of conversations with local men and women, once trust was established on account of me being introduced as a colleague by the Greenpeace Mahan team.

Interviews with the Greenpeace Mahan team members and local movement leaders were conducted over a series of one-on-one and group interactions at various locations in Singrauli. This process helped to cross-reference accounts of key moments in the movement that had not been documented or published on the Greenpeace India website, particularly details of the local authorities and company officials tactics of intimidation towards the local movement. The process of cross-referencing proved effective in gathering in richer and deeper perspective of what occurred in Mahan in three ways: it helped to understand the difference in perspective between the Greenpeace Mahan team members, between the six movement leaders, and most importantly, between the Greenpeace activists who belong to the urban-based middle class, and the forest-village based locals.

Appendix 2 – Interview guide for India

Semi structured interview guide (questions, prompts, points)

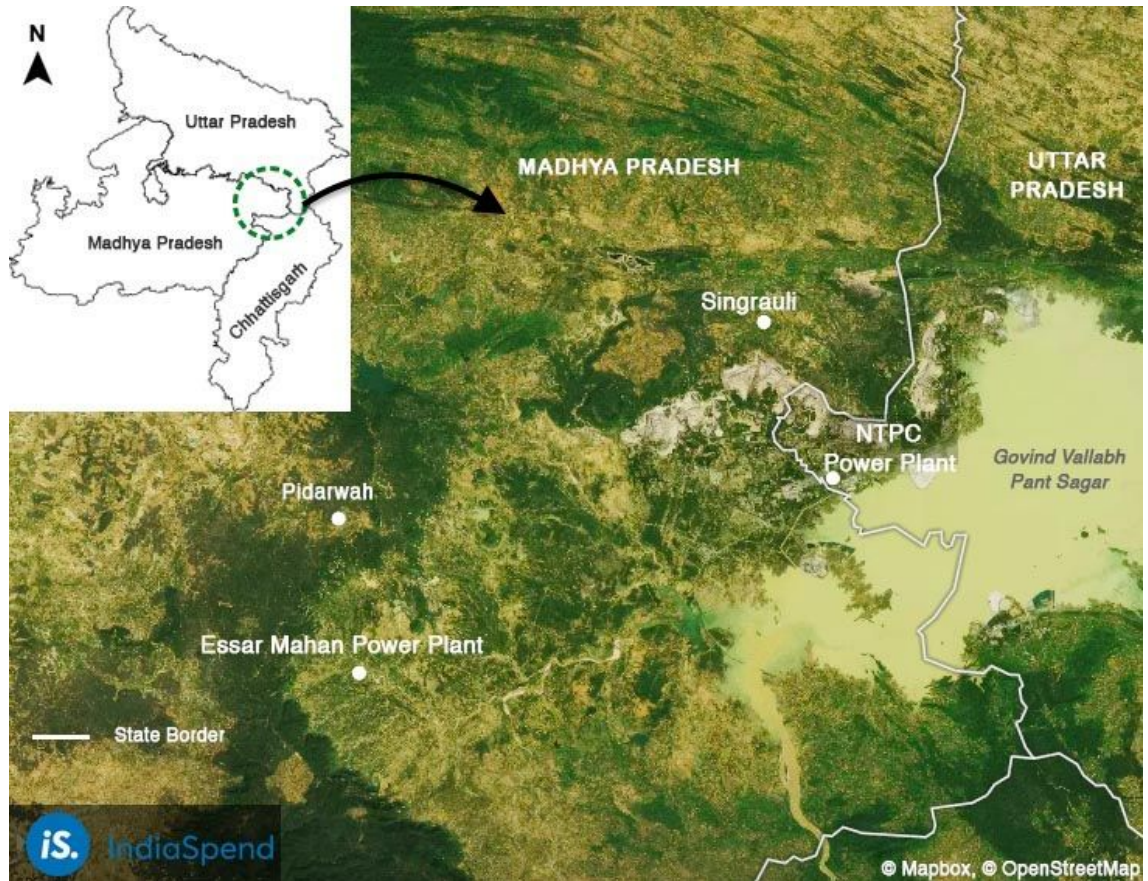
The order of the questions will vary depending on the interviewee and previous (issue/interest) specific interactions the interviewer (me) has had with her/him.

1. What are some of the most significant environmental movements in the last two decades?
2. The issue of land, displacement and livelihood concerns are common across most environmental movements. Apart from that, can you comment on the similarity of their legal and political claims, and their interconnectedness?
3. How are the claims, arguments, alliances and networks of today's environmental movements different from older environmental struggles such as Chipko and Narmada?
4. So, reflecting on what you have just said, can you broadly identify what all has changed in India since the late 1990s, which makes environmental activism different today?
5. What strikes you as the most significant difference in activism now, or even the conditions from which it arises now, something that would have been unimaginable in the 1980s? (use prompts if needed: arguments, resources and tools including social media, narratives, networks formed by local resistances and established environmental groups?)
6. Lets make this more specific. Roughly from the mid-1990s, how have neoliberalisation of India's economy and the intensification of mining and development affected and changed environmental activism?
7. Broadly corresponding with this time frame of the last two decades, can you think of ways in which environmental activism in India might have

shifted due to the emergence of the global challenge of climate change, in terms of arguments, claims, and also opportunity for political and alliance building?

8. Can you reflect on how environmental activism has changed in the last two decades globally, and its similarities and differences with the Indian context?
9. Where all and what all are you thinking of when you think about the global?
10. The other part of this research relates to environmental activism in Australia. Finally, I am comparing new and emerging forms of environmental activism in India and Australia. What (all) comes to mind when I say Australian environmental movements?

Appendix 3 – Map of the proposed (and suspended) coal mine site in India



A satellite map of India's energy capital Singrauli, and the Mahan forests. Source: IndiaSpend, India.

Appendix 4 - Fieldwork in Australia

Semi-structured interviews with national ENGO representatives

I conducted 24 semi-structured interviews between 2017 and 2018. Ten of these were with representatives from national ENGOs that are part of Stop Adani, based either in Sydney or Melbourne. Due to the large number of environmental groups, both professional ENGOs and grassroots organisations, that was part of Stop Adani, and contributed in specific and strategic ways to its activism, I had to interview a representative selection of groups from its national network. I selected the ten respondents from a network of activists I am familiar with, based on my background in environmental activism in Australia. Apart from selecting a representative set of organisations to interview from the Stop Adani movement, the familiarity and prior knowledge of the movement helped me to approach a representative set of respondents, based on a deliberate mix of factors such as seniority, areas of experience and expertise and gender. The ten respondents included a co-founder and a senior strategist from the Sunrise Project, a new and small organisation within the Stop Adani movement that provides strategic support to local and community fights against fossil fuel projects in Australia.

It included the head of campaigns at the Australian Marine Conservation Society, the CEO of 350.org Australia, a campaigner from Greenpeace, the director of the Wilderness Society, the head of campaigns and a campaigner from the Australian Conservation Foundation, and the campaign coordinator for Friends of the Earth. These six national ENGOs perform various strategic roles within the Stop Adani movement, the first is based in Brisbane, the second, third and fourth in Sydney, and the fifth and sixth in Melbourne. I also interviewed an organiser from the new grassroots mobilisation network Tipping Point based in Sydney, which formed in response to the need to mobilise a mass national urban constituency in Australia for climate action.

Participant observation, semi-structured interviews, and fieldwork in Queensland

During my first Queensland field trip in September 2017, I attended a Stop Adani public mobilization-planning summit in Brisbane and conducted my first three interviews with respondents from Queensland based environmental groups fighting the Carmichael coal mine. This included the solicitor from Queensland's Environment Defender's Office, the coordinator of the grassroots action group Galilee Blockade, and the state coordinator of the national political activist group GetUp.

During this fieldtrip I also conducted interviews with the youth spokesperson of the W&J traditional owner's family council, and the (non-Indigenous) media and legal liaison of the W&J's 'No means No' campaign, in Brisbane. I followed up this first round of interviews with follow up phone-based conversations in 2018, as the W&J's legal challenges progressed through the court. The conversations and interactions with the W&J representatives were based on a broader and mutual interest to understand and compare the rights and politics of Indigenous groups in India and Australia.

During my second Queensland fieldtrip in October 2017, I spent a week in the Mackay Conservation Group's office for participant observation. This time period was in the lead up to the state elections in which the Carmichael coal mine was a significant issue. Being able to be based in the MCG's office at this time helped me get a good understanding of the challenges, including the political power of coal in Central Queensland and the lack of funding and resources for local Queensland groups. Being allowed to observe national campaign planning sessions (held over web-based platforms) helped me to observe the interactions and internal power dynamics between the MCG and national ENGOs. I interviewed the current and former coordinators and campaign organizer of MCG, and one of its most active volunteers. I also interviewed the Stop Adani coordinator of Airlie Beach on the Central Coast in the MCG office, since it serves as a meeting place for activists and volunteers from Central Queensland. Being based in Mackay for a week, I was able to hold extended interview sessions with these four respondents, apart from having several conversations with other regular volunteers at the office.

The week at the MCG office was followed by a fieldtrip to the Galilee Basin, when I interviewed three representatives from the Farmers for Climate Action (FFCA), a national advocacy and alliance of Australian farmers for climate action and environmental sustainability. The respondents included two farmers, and an FFCA organiser based in Central Queensland. I approached them through known contacts within the Queensland and national Stop Adani movement.

My third fieldtrip to the state in November 2017 focussed on Townsville in North Queensland that had been announced as the Adani Group's regional headquarters, where I interviewed the executive director of the North Queensland Conservation Group, and held discussions with the local Stop Adani groups in Townsville and on Magnetic Island adjoining Townsville.

Workshops

My Australian fieldwork also took an additional turn due to a growing interest amongst environmental activists about anti-coal movements in India, on account of their being involved in a coal mining conflict with an Indian corporation with a track record of significant environmental violations in India. I presented on my Indian fieldwork on the Mahan movement and the politics of coal in India to local Stop Adani groups and other ENGO sessions at several locations in Queensland – at a public session organised at the Mackay Conservation Group office, at Stop Adani group sessions in Townsville and Magnetic Island in North Queensland, and Yeppoon on the Central coast. I also presented at Greenpeace in Sydney, and at Environment Justice Australia and Friends of the Earth in Melbourne. Questions and observations from the attendants helped to add granularity to my understanding of the difference in the perceptions of environmental actors in India and Australia, and ultimately to fine-tune the analysis and conceptualisation of shared ground between environmentalisms in Australia and India.

Appendix 5 – Interview guide for Australia

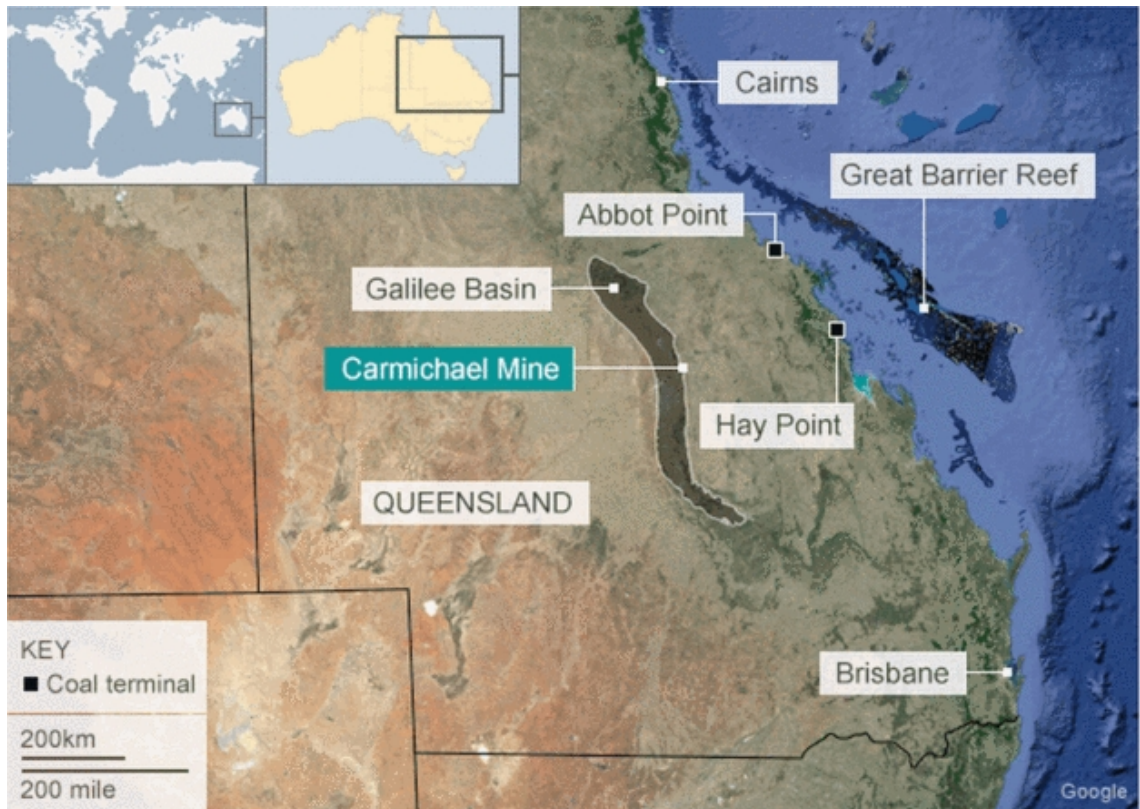
Semi structured interview guide (questions, prompts, points)

The order of the questions will vary depending on the interviewee and previous (issue/interest) specific interactions the interviewer (me) has had with her/him.

1. What are the most significant environmental resistances to have emerged across Australia in the last two decades?
2. Can you reflect on how these movements have been influenced by one another? Were their legal and political claims similar, and what kind of networks and alliances did they forge with other environmental and non-environmental interests and stakeholders locally?
3. Were the nature of the claims, politics, tactics and networks of these environmental resistances different from that of older environmental movements? Think of the classic wilderness struggles of the 1980s, but also the anti-nuclear movement.
4. So, reflecting on what you have just said, can you broadly identify what all has changed in Australia since the late 1990s, that may make environmental activism different now than back in those times?
5. What strikes you as the most significant difference in activism now, or even the conditions from which it arises now, almost like something that would have been impossible/unimaginable in the 1980s? (use prompts if needed: arguments, resources and tools including social media, narratives, networks formed by local resistances and established environmental groups, emergence of new environmental groups?)

6. Lets break that down a bit more. Once again, roughly related to that time frame, what obvious changes have you seen in activism since the mining boom?
7. And, once again related to that time frame, can you think of broad ways in which environmental activism in Australia has shifted since the emergence of climate change as a risk to deal with, in terms of arguments, claims, and also opportunity for political and alliance building?
8. Do you think the definition/understanding of the term 'environmental' is changing, with climate change likely to impact protected wilderness anyway, and an uprising of local struggles against coal, oil and gas around the country?
9. And can you reflect on how environmental activism has changed in the last two decades globally?
10. So the other part of this research relates to environmental activism in India. I am comparing new and emerging forms of environmental activism in India and Australia. What (all) comes to mind when I say Indian environmental movements?

Appendix 6 – Map of proposed coal mine site in Australia



Map of the Galilee Basin in Central-west Queensland and the location of the Carmichael coal project. Source: British Broadcasting Corporation.

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