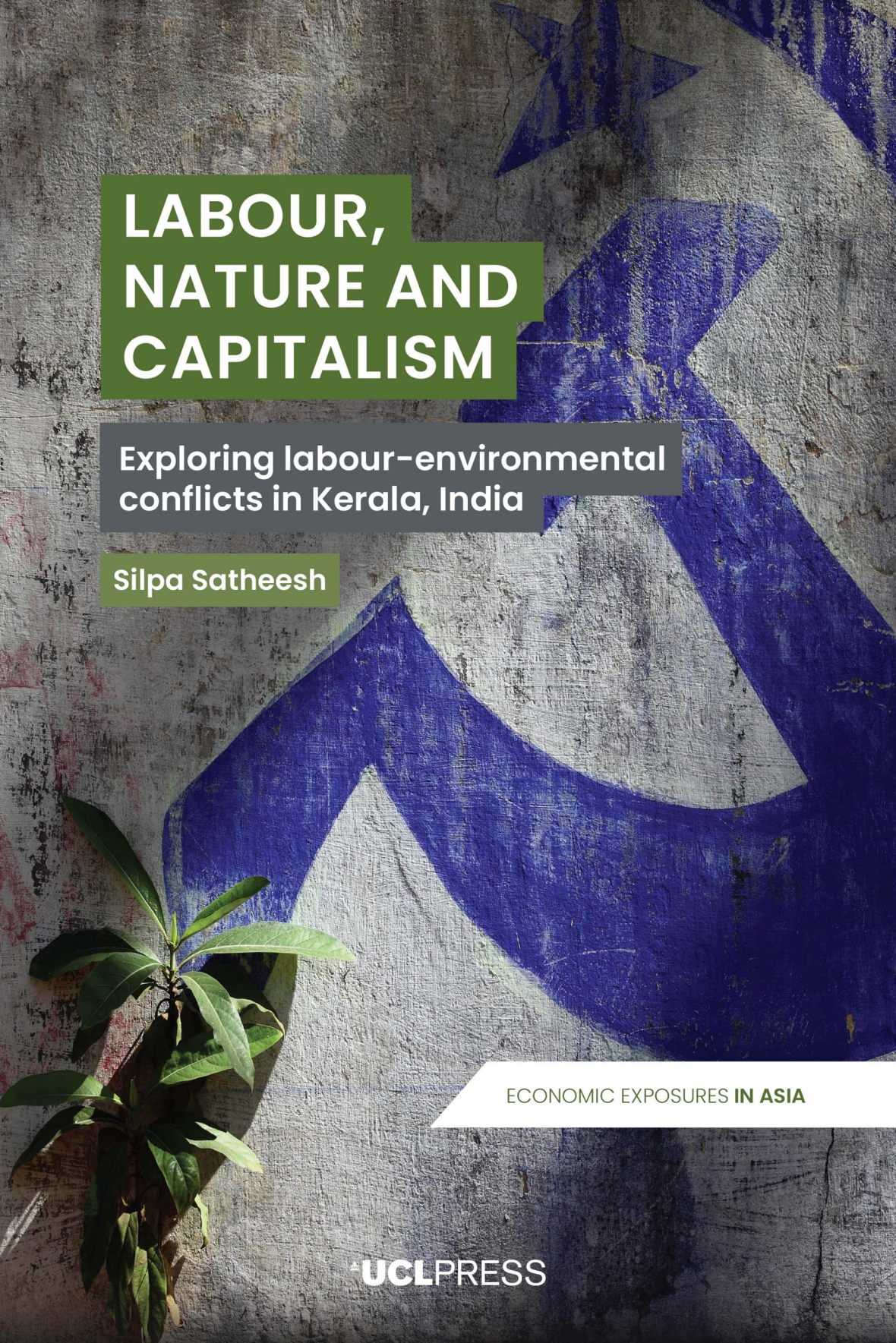
LABOUR, NATURE AND CAPITALISM
Exploring labour-environmental conflicts in Kerala, India
Silpa Satheesh
ECONOMIC EXPOSURES IN ASIA
UCLPRESS

Labour, Nature and Capitalism

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To my dear son Aadi, grandparents and parents.

To my mentor, Dr Benford.

To all people who fight against social, economic and environmental injustices.

In solidarity!

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Preface

This book is written in a context where the imminent danger from climate catastrophe has nations scrambling to adapt both politics and practice, to seemingly address the issue without disturbing the extractive apparatus created by fossil capitalism. The increase in extreme weather events across the planet has served to reveal how poor, socially marginalised and working-class communities are disproportionately exposed to the dangers of climate disruptions. Sociological approaches that consider climate change have thus pivoted their inquiries into how climate change affects existing systems of social and economic inequalities (Dunlap and Brulle 2015). Labour-centred approaches that problematise the linkage between climate change, labour and the question of just transition have carved a niche within the discourse on Anthropocene and Circular Economy (Morena et al. 2020; Stevis and Felli 2020 and Guillibert et al. 2023). The growing recognition of the heightened impacts of climate change on jobs and workers' health by international agencies[1] is matched in academic framings that conceptualise climate change as an aspect of 'class war' (Huber 2022).

Furthermore, many international trade unions and labour organisations explicitly pin the cause of climate change on to capitalist excesses. They then work towards forming solidarity networks against the capitalist exploitation of labour and nature – rather like the alliance between *Teamsters and Turtles* and many lesser-known examples from the Global South. It is therefore in this backdrop that *Labour, Nature and Capitalism* goes on a slight tangent to explore the antagonistic relationship between trade unions and grassroots environmental movements that protest against industrial pollution in Kerala, a state in South India.

Given the global traction gained by calls for socio-ecological transformations by labour organisations, the case explored here represents the complexities involved in forming alliances in countries in the Global South where both capitalist and pre-capitalist modes of production coexist. This situation also poses unique impediments to forming a collective identity and unifying workers who are embedded within various systems of production and are therefore guided by diverse class interests. Moreover, subsequent discussions underscore the need for integrating the issue of informal sector workers into the scheme of

discourse surrounding just transition to ensure that transitions do not exacerbate existing social inequalities.

This book is written in the hope of building better and stronger alliances between labour and environmental movements in an era characterised by the transition of trade unions and the institutionalisation of grievances. In order to do this, identification of the structural factors, social actors and economic interests that create schisms becomes pertinent. As subsequent chapters will show, the political economy of industrial capitalism and the dynamic nexus between unions, the state and local industries create unique hurdles in forging solidarities within the social movement landscape. This book thus tries to expose the complex interactions between labour, nature and capital that occur in contemporary society. By delving deeper into the experiences of movement actors, as they navigate the tumultuous terrain, I seek to map the strategies used and perpetrated by capitalist logic against anti-capitalist movements. From this I have drawn a number of analytical generalisations that will aid in the process of movement theorisation from below.

Note

1 Reports of international agencies including ILO (2019), WEF (2023) and UNDP (2016) clearly explain the adverse effects of climate change on workers' safety, health and wellbeing.

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Thank you to everyone who has been around with compassion during this rollercoaster ride of what's called life.

Words are not enough to express my gratitude to the members of the two organisations who have co-operated with and supported this project since its inception. Thank you for letting me into your 'movement settings' and for giving me valuable time. Fieldwork has always been a potent reminder of how little of the complicated social world gets captured in the abstractions at which we often strive to arrive. Thank you to all the people who are standing up to oppressive forces across the globe to bring the possibility of a better world to fruition.

Heartfelt gratitude to my mentor, Dr Robert D. Benford, for helping me to learn the importance of kindness and compassion in the neoliberal world of individualised knowledge production. This project would not have taken off were it not for your encouragement and mentorship. I have no words to thank Drs Pal, Aranda, Graham and Cavendish, as well as the Department of Sociology at the University of South Florida, for offering a fertile academic ground where this project could take root. Many thanks also to the series editor, Professor Rebecca Empson, for this opportunity. This work has benefited immensely from the comments provided by the anonymous reviewers, who I thank from the bottom of my heart. Nor would this book have been possible without the generous support and help of Chris Penfold, Elliot Beck and Jaimee Biggins at UCL Press and copyeditor Catherine Bradley. Thank you!

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I do not think I can ever thank my family enough for their endurance and love. Thank you *appuppan* (grandpa) and *ammumma* (grandma) for showing me the power of selfless love, forgiveness and laughter. Heartfelt gratitude to my *amma* (mother) and *achan* (father) for taking over caring responsibilities so that I could work. Thank you Achu, Appu, Aravind and Sreya. And most importantly, thank you, Aadi. Every day

you amaze me with your love, understanding and curiosity, my dear. This is for you!

I remember Narayanan sir, Leela teacher, Balchettan, Ammumma and Valyachan, all of whom stayed close to my heart but left this world too soon, with love and gratitude.

1
Introduction

'As the river burns, the land weeps' reads the caption of an image of the River Periyar printed on the front page of a supplement published in the Kochi edition of a leading Malayalam newspaper. The photograph captured the River Periyar, the longest river in Kerala, flowing in two different colours on either side of the Pathalam Regulator Bridge in the Eloor-Edayar industrial region (Fig. 1.1). It was accompanied by a feature highlighting the issue of pollution and reduced oxygen supply in the river. The image was re-posted and shared widely on social media platforms including Facebook, where one such post pasted the new image alongside an old photograph.

An image of the same river, taken by Sainudheen Edayar in 2005, soon became the symbol of local industrial pollution; it played an instrumental role in garnering legitimacy for the fight against pollution. Similar to the photograph featured on Malayala Manorama (Fig 1.1), this second image (Fig. 1.2) offers a glimpse into the river's plight by focusing on a point of intersection between two stretches of water: one that flows through the industrial hub and another that skirts the local villages. The small stream circling the industries can be seen in brick-red colour (Fig. 1.2), whereas the other arm of the river is green, reflecting the lush green landscape around. A quick comparison shows that the two images, taken almost 15 years apart, carry striking similarities in terms of the river water's discoloration.

Despite the symbolism of the imagery and the central role it occupies in the anti-pollution campaign, the issue of pollution and local industries' role in creating it remain fluid in the activist landscape. Furthermore, contested interpretations surrounding the existence and causes of pollution have ignited a conflict between trade unions and

Figure 1.1 The River Periyar flowing in two different colours on either side of Pathalam bridge near Eloor, Ernakulam. Courtesy of Sainudheen Edayar.

Figure 1.2 An image depicting the discoloration of the River Periyar due to pollution. Courtesy of Sainudheen Edayar.

local environmental movements in the Eloor-Edayar industrial region. In attempting to refute claims created by the other, each movement develops opposing frames to establish their respective versions of 'movement reality', in which the many shades of the flowing river are pushed to the backdrop.

Focusing on the tensions between the Standing Council of Trade Unions (SCTU hereafter), a union collective, and the local environmental movement led by Periyar Malineekarana Virudha Samithi (Periyar Anti-Pollution Committee, PMVS hereafter), I seek to understand these framing contestations, or frame-disputes, between labour and green movements in Kerala's Eloor-Edayar industrial belt. In doing so, I situate these conflicts within the larger backdrop of structural and political-economic factors. These include the advent of industrial capitalism, the political economy of development, the ideology of capitalism and the nexus between state and local industries.

Stand-offs between labour and environmental organisations, popularly known as the 'blue-green conflicts', offer classic examples of the impasse between the dominant model of economic growth and environmental protection. Reflecting the clash between the economy and the environment, the 'jobs versus environment' trade-off has been a focal point of tension in the relationship between trade unions and environmental movements across the globe. Previous research into the tensions between trade unions and environmental movements has largely explained their antagonism as a 'class-conflict' between working-class trade unions and middle-class environmental movements (Rose 2000). However, such class-based explanations fail to uncover the reasons behind labour-environmental conflicts when both these movements have participants from similar socio-economic backgrounds.

To put it another way, the existing theoretical explanations, solely rooted in class, fall short in accounting for conflicts between trade unions and environmental movements, particularly in the context of countries in the Global South,[1] where working-class participants mainly constitute both movements. Highlighting the singular and reductive focus of the extant literature on labour-environmental conflicts, this book establishes the need for fresh inquiries that move beyond Western contexts and class-based explanations. Additionally, by situating the conflict between labour and environmental movements within the backdrop of capitalist development, this book calls for the need to integrate the role of political economy, the state and industrial capital in order to better understand such tensions. Using the case of labour-environmental conflicts in the Eloor-Edayar industrial belt, this book delves into the linkages between labour, nature and capital in Kerala's social movement landscape. In so doing it offers re-reading of the much-acclaimed 'Kerala model' from the standpoints of environmental justice and sustainability.

Significance of this inquiry

The mounting threat from climate disruption, combined with the heightened vulnerabilities of poor and socially marginalised communities to the impact of environmental damage, make discussions surrounding collective efforts to tackle climate change relevant and timely. Furthermore, labour and environmental movements are often portrayed as two powerful social movements able to establish a formidable alliance against the climate emergency (Barca 2012, 2016; Snell and Fairbrother 2011; Kojola et al. 2014) by advancing policies that protect both working people and the natural environment (Obach 2004a, 2004b; Liu 2006; Mayer 2009).

Labour and environmental movements are often viewed as natural or potential allies considering their structural and contradictory positions regarding industrial capital within the capitalist production system (Foster 1993; Jakopovich 2009; Huan 2014). Eco-socialist and social justice perspectives highlight the need to bring labour and environmental movements together to achieve socio-ecological transformation (Sarkar 1999; Pepper 2002); this is particularly the case in a context where coalition formation has become an essential strategy of social movement organisations (Yandle 1983; Van Dyke and McCammon 2010; McCammon and Moon 2015). According to Jakopovich:

> Environmentalists are workers' obvious potential allies in their efforts to advance workplace health and safety, and also to tackle environmental concerns of working-class communities: for workers bear the brunt of environmental degradation and destruction, both in terms of health and quality-of-life issues. (Jakopovich 2009,75)

Global environmental change and the subsequent discourse surrounding a just transition call for coalitions among social movements focusing on environmental issues and social justice grievances (race, gender, class, disability and sexuality), reiterating the need for an intersectional approach. However, commitment to the ideology of economic growth and structural location in the treadmill of production sets labour at odds with environmental organisations in matters related to environmental protection or regulations (Buechler 1995; Gould et al. 2004; Räthzel and Uzzell 2011, 2012). In other words, labour unions and environmental organisations exemplify a complicated relationship between organisations – one in which the existence of certain overlapping and conflicting interests makes it difficult to form inter-movement ties. According to Obach:

> These so-called jobs-versus-the-environment disputes have fractured progressive forces, preventing the implementation of government policies that are sensitive to both the environment and the needs of workers. A just and sustainable economy is the goal of both unions and environmentalists, yet still divisions between these two groups are common. (Obach 2004a, 7)

Such conflicts between labour and environmental movements assume significance in a context where both labour and nature face exploitation under the capitalist treadmill of production (Gould et al. 1996; Obach 2004b). Both labour and environmental movements, so to speak, can be explained as collective responses to the exploitation and grievances engendered by capitalism and its mode of production. Contrary to labour movements that are associated with the 'first contradiction of capital', the environmental movements can be seen as emanating from the 'second contradiction of capital' where capitalism destroys the conditions of production (O'Connor 1991, 1998; Foster 2002). Given this backdrop, inquiries into the relationship between labour, nature and capital, the three agencies of the green economy, would certainly expand the discussions on just transition, and even more so in the discussions surrounding transition to a circular economy (Barca 2015; Guillibert et al. 2023).

Moreover, given the ubiquitous presence of strained relationships between trade unions and environmental movements across the globe (Obach 2004a; Räthzel and Uzzell 2011, 2013), a careful exploration of the factors that create such antagonisms and dynamics of contentions is important, even while striving to build sustainable alliances between progressive movement groups. Furthermore, this exploration is significant in the context of what Dan Clawson refers to as a possible 'next upsurge' – which, if it were to happen, would require another transformation of the labour movement 'where the unions fuse with the movements of the 1960s', thereby producing new forms and taking up new issues (Clawson 2003, x, 26, 52, 194).

Labour-environmental conflicts: a critical review

Why do trade unions and environmental movements treat one another as enemies? Studies exploring labour-environmental conflicts have pointed out that the policies designed to protect the natural environment impose a greater economic burden on the working class, causing tensions

in the relationship between labour and environmental movements (Buttel and Larson 1980; Buttel, Geisler and Wiswall 1984; Zimmerman 1986; Gottlieb 1993). Research on labour-environmental conflicts can be broadly divided into two: firstly, class-based theoretical analyses; secondly, empirical economic analyses. The class-based theories root their explanation on the interest-based and cultural differences between working-class trade unions and middle-class environmental movements, whereas economic analyses engage in cost-benefit analyses highlighting the jobs versus the environment trade-off.

Jobs versus the environment: exploring the trade-off

The trade-off between jobs and environmental protection remains in the literature as one of the primary reasons for labour-environmental confrontation across the globe (Buttel 1986; Dewey 1998; Dreiling 1998; Gladwin 1980; Gordon 1998; Gottlieb 1993; Jones and Dunlap 1992; Kazis and Grossman 1991; Morrison 1986; Potier 1986; Ringquist 1995; Siegmann 1986; Watts 1986). Popularly referred to as 'blue-green conflicts', these represent situations in which blue-collar workers suffer for the benefit of the environment and its primarily middle-class advocates (Cooper 1992; Gray 1995; Obach 2002). According to Obach (2004a, 10), 'virtually every instance of labour-environmental conflict involves either a threat to existing jobs or the loss of potential jobs'. Yet even when the conflict is presented as a trade-off between jobs and the environment, as it often is, studies have explained how environmental protection is simply not the 'job killer' that it is frequently made out to be (Kazis and Grossman 1982; Goodstein 1999, 7; Obach 2002). In fact, many empirical studies exist that confirm the positive effect of environmental protection on levels of employment (Kazis and Grossman 1982; Meyer 1992, 1993; OECD 1997; Jakopovich 2009).

According to Siegmann (1985, 186), the 'jobs versus environment' explanation of the conflict between labour and environmental groups is generally unsound and often based on 'ideological perception'. According to Kazis and Grossman (1982), claims of job losses stemming from environmental regulation are often politically motivated. Debunking the claims of job loss, the authors point out that:

> Environmental protection not only creates jobs, it also saves jobs. Fishing, forestry, tourism, agriculture, and the growing leisure and outdoor recreation industries are all important sources of jobs

> which depend directly upon clean water, clean air, and wilderness for their continuation and growth. (Kazis and Grossman 1982, 18)

Eban Goodstein (1999, 9) debunks the 'job loss' claim in his book *The Trade-Off Myth: Fact and fiction about jobs and the environment*. In this work he reviews two decades of research on jobs and the environment and finds no factual basis for the conventional wisdom that assumes an integral trade-off between jobs and environmental regulations. The author critically explores the claim that environmental protection creates large-scale unemployment, describing it as a 'fiction' that needs to be understood in the American context of ever-increasing job insecurity and growing income inequality.

Moreover, many scholars have pointed out that the 'jobs versus environment' trade-off has been used by corporate and state power discursively to construct employment and environmental goals in opposition to one another (Adkin 1998; Kazis and Grossman 1982, 1991; Kojola 2017). Accordingly, the discursive construction of the 'job versus the environment' myth should be explored critically in the context of expanding global capital and neoliberal economic policies (Jakopovich 2009). Kojola's (2017) study makes significant strides in this regard. It explores the role of media discourse in constructing the taken-for-granted division between the economy and the environment using the case of the Keystone XL pipeline controversy.

Although previous research has shown that the claims surrounding job loss are in effect a myth, the 'jobs versus environment' trade-off continues to be one of the popular tropes invoked in labour-environmental conflicts (Räthzel and Uzzell 2011, 2012). The popularity of the jobs vs. environment trade-off, despite the presence of scientific studies that undermine these claims, stands testimony to the era of post-truth politics in which facts seldom form part of grievance construction for social movements. In addition, such binary framings often are deployed to exacerbate the conflicts between labour and green movements, in order to silence any discussions about alternative models of development and economic growth (Kojola 2017).

Hao and Van Brown (2019) reaffirm this point in the context of the US by highlighting the insignificant contribution of coal production to economic wellbeing. In this study, which assesses the economic impacts of fossil fuel production in the US from 2001 to 2015, the authors highlight how the production of coal has only resulted in increased CO_2 emissions, with insignificant impacts on the local economy. The findings of this study are extremely important considering the amplified disputes

and political debates surrounding coal production and local economic wellbeing in the US.

In sum, the studies underscore the political sensibilities associated with the use of jobs-loss as a counterframing strategy to discredit environmental movements fighting for a greener alternative. Having said that, one cannot deny the very pressing issue of ensuring a socially and ecologically just transition to an alternative system in the present times. The dialogues surrounding the question of just transition, its varied definitions, particularly in the context of energy regime changes, should certainly be facilitated, so as to ensure that the 'clean' regime does not reiterate existing inequalities or instigate new forms (Stevis 2023). Furthermore, these concerns are important; they make a stronger case to build solidarity networks and alliances between trade unions and green movements.

Class-based theoretical analyses

Many scholars identify the tension between labour and environmental groups as a class issue between working-class trade unions and middle-class environmental movements, where differences in class interests and cultures produce conflicting identities (Buttel and Larson 1980; Buttel, Geisler and Wiswall 1984; Zimmerman 1986; Gottlieb 1993; Foster 1993; Rose 2000; Gould et al. 2004). According to Brian Mayer, 'attempts to forge ties across cross-movement divides face challenges that are rooted in class and ideological differences that have historically generated conflict between labour and environmental movements (2009, 219). For Gould et al. (2004), the divergent foci and origins of the environmentalism of the working class and the upper and middle class dominated mainstream environmental organisations present major obstacles to the emergence of a successful blue-green coalition. In his book *Coalition Across Class-Divide* Fred Rose (2000, 107) identifies class and cultural differences existing between working-class trade unions and middle-class environmental movements as the primary factors that prevent the formation of an alliance between these two movements. All five cases in this study featured educated and middle-class environmental movements that are politically and culturally distinct from working-class trade unions.

This distinction based on class lines in the extant literature can be traced back to the mainstream literature on movements that conceive environmentalism as a middle-class phenomenon. The social base of an

educated, new middle class, origins in postindustrial society and postmaterial value orientations have all been identified as characteristic features of environmental movements in the mainstream literature (Inglehart 1981; Cohen 1985; Buechler 1995; Rootes 2004). This has also been the predominant characterisation in the present literature that explores the conflict between trade unions and environmental movements (Gottlieb 1993; Rose 2000; Gould et al. 2004; Obach 2004a; Mayer 2009).

As a response to such sweeping class-based explanations, a few studies have highlighted the inadequacy of class-based explanations to understand the relations between labour and environmental movements (Obach 2002, 2004a; Norton 2003). Obach argues that 'given the array of interests within social-class categories, no broad class alliances can be anticipated in regard to the environment and that only ad hoc coalitions around particular issues will emerge' (Obach 2002, 84). According to him, 'class-based theoretical assessments may oversimplify the political coalitions that emerge around environmental issues'; he argues instead for a 'more fine-grained empirical analysis of the distributional effects of environmental policy' comprehensively to understand labour-environmental relations.[2] Following a similar line of argument, Norton points out that:

> class accounts of environmentalism, and the thesis of class as a determinant of conflict in the LER, presume a 'generative' class theory (class theory as explanation of the purported causal processes) by which social structures give rise to collective political consciousness and action. (Norton, 2003, 97)

Such a class theory, he maintains, is not backed by sociological evidence.

There also have been some efforts to highlight the role of structural and political-economic factors in engendering labour-environmental conflicts. Studies by Obach (2004a), Jakopovich (2009), Huan (2014) and Liu (2015) highlight the role of structural and political-economic factors while exploring the relationship between labour and environmental movements. For example, Jakopovich (2009) holds neoliberal capitalism responsible for the absence of a progressive alliance between labour and the environment. According to him:

> the growing insecurities and competition caused by the neoliberal 'race to the bottom' have provoked outbursts of chauvinism, xenophobia and parochialism among the working class, which has hindered the potential for meaningful progressive action

and the development of broad, inclusive and creative alliances. (Jakopovich 2009, 77)

Despite the selective reservations on class-based explanations, almost all these studies have unitarily considered environmental movements as middle-class phenomena. Such singular conception stems from the fact that almost all these studies have focused on Western cases of labour-environmental conflicts, where the environmental movements involved in the conflict were largely led by middle-class participants holding postmaterialist value orientations. Even studies by Huan (2014)[3] and Liu (2015) that considered non-Western cases of labour-environmental relations have followed these broad patterns by considering environmentalism as a middle-class phenomenon, thereby reaffirming the class-based differentiation.

In the book *Leverage of the Weak: Labour and environmental movements in Taiwan and South Korea* (2015), Hwa-Jen Liu explores the sequence of labour and environmental movements in both these countries, seeking to explain why these movements appear at different times in a nation's development. This is one of the most systematic explorations of the interactions between labour and environmental movements in Asia that is grounded in the theories of social movements. Moving beyond the sole focus on class and highlighting the role of power bases, Liu explores the origin of movement sequences and the role of institutions and development practice in a country-specific manner. Yet, in a way quite similar to other class-based studies, Liu distinguishes between labour and environmental movements along class lines: the labour movement is constituted of wage labourers and environmental movements of participants from among both pollution victims and an educated class.

In other words, the nuances of inter-movement relationship remain underexplored when both movements have working-class origins. The extant conceptions of environmentalism as a middle-class phenomenon in the mainstream literature on labour-environmental relations can be critiqued for two reasons. Firstly, it completely omits cases of labour-environmental conflicts from the Global South. Secondly, it overlooks the environmental justice movements in the Global North (Taylor 1997, 2016). As explicated by the discussion above, most existing studies on labour-environmental conflicts are confined to Western contexts, exploring postindustrial societies. Even when there are studies that move beyond Western contexts, the case studies used in such works continue to fit within the class-based distinction between working-class

trade unions and middle-class environmental movements. This is especially the case when one considers the almost total omission of postcolonial settings – in which the history of colonisation and the legacy of colonial models of development have profound and long-standing influences on the nature and trajectory of social movement mobilisations.

In addition, there have currently been almost no systematic attempts to capture the relationship between labour and environmental movements in the Global South. The study by Chomsky and Striffler (2014) which explores the relationship between labour and environmental movements in Latin America deals exclusively with coalitions. The neglect of conflicts is rampant even within mainstream literature; most of the studies published in the last two decades focused on coalitions. Seminal works (Rose 2000; Obach 2004a; Mayer 2009) have all focused exclusively on labour-environmental coalitions. Even when Liu (2015) and Huan (2014) embark on promising projects, seeking to explore the interface between labour and environmental movements in the Asian context, their studies are situated within or built around the class-based distinction between labour and environmental movements.

It must certainly be noted that scholars including Satgar (2018) and Pillay (2016; 2021) have engaged in very detailed structural and political-economic explorations of labour-environmental relations in the South African context with a focus on the eco-social politics undertaken by unions there. Similar are the inquiries that investigate labour's response to climate change (Cock 2011; Räthzel, Cock and Uzzell 2018). Moreover, the emergence of Environmental Labour Studies as an area of research (Räthzel and Uzzell 2012; Räthzel, Stevis and Uzzell 2021) has facilitated the bringing together of studies that look at labour-environmental relations but remain scattered and stay at the intersection of so many areas and disciplines; it also extends the discussion to encompass the theory and praxis surrounding just transition. Additionally, works featured in *The Palgrave Handbook of Environmental Labour Studies* (Räthzel, Stevis and Uzzell 2021) address the critique surrounding the inclusion of contexts from the Global South to a large extent (Rajan 2021; Sikwebu and Aron 2021; Latorre 2021; Cock 2021; Leandro et al. 2021).

Having said that, the factors that antagonise labour and environmental movements, particularly in a country such as India, where a huge informal economy poses unique challenges to the unification of working-class, warrant greater attention. This book therefore strives to contribute to this scholarship by focusing on a case of labour-environmental conflict located in Kerala, a South Indian state, where working-class participants

constitute both these movements. To set the background for such an inquiry, the rest of the review explains the resource-poor environmental movements of the Global South, with a special focus on postcolonial India, by highlighting the confluence of material and environmental grievances in their protest vocabularies.

Environmental movements in the Global South

As is evident from the discussion above, the mainstream literature on social movements largely characterises the environmental movement as a middle-class phenomenon grounded in postmaterial values. Contrary to such theoretical conceptions, many developing and less developed countries such as India, Brazil, Malaysia and Kenya all have growing environmental movements[4] with markedly lower-class constituencies and social justice orientations (Dwivedi 2001; Rootes 2009; Motta and Nilsen 2011; Guha and Martinez-Alier 2013). Addressing the reductive exposition of environmentalism, Dwivedi points out the need to consider environmental movements as an 'envelope' encompassing a 'variety of socially and discursively constructed ideologies and actions, theories, and practices' (Dwivedi 2001, 12). In seeking to eradicate the myth of environmentalism as a middle-class phenomenon, Gadgil and Guha argue that 'poor countries … poor individuals and poor communities within them, have shown a strong interest in environmental issues' (1994, 131). Challenging the dominant narrative, these studies establish the poor and working-class base of the local environmental movements, where people fight to preserve the natural resource base crucial for their daily survival (Karan 1994; Guha 1989). These struggles thus incorporate both material and ecological grievances into their protest lexicons. Moreover, Martinez-Alier et al. (2016) invoke the idea of a global environmental justice movement, drawing parallels between the environmental movements in the Global South and environmental justice movements in the Global North, and so establishing the need to think beyond the North–South binary.

Popularly dubbed as 'environmentalism of the poor' (Martinez-Alier 2003) in the literature on ecology movements from the Global South,[5] these resource-poor and working-class movements are often organised by socially and economically marginalised people to fight against the plunder of natural resources. The environmentalism of the poor, or the 'empty-belly' variant of environmentalism, is quite distinct from the 'full-stomach' environmentalism (featured extensively in the

literature on labour-environmental conflicts) in its focus on environmental inequalities, material grievances and unequal distribution of burdens (Martinez-Alier 2014). Whereas the mainstream environmentalism is often portrayed as a fight to preserve pristine environments and natural resources, the working-class environmentalism seeks to expose the underlying inequalities and selective environmental vulnerabilities of people at the margins. The vibrant presence of environmental movements, both radical and reformative, across the developing world debunks the theoretical claims that characterise environmental movements as a middle-class phenomenon situated in a postindustrial society.

In other words, the environmentalism of the poor has very different agendas than the environmentalism of the rich (Gadgil and Guha 1994). The integration of material grievances alongside culture and identity within these ecological movements makes such movements incomprehensible within the mainstream framework. The environmental movements in many developing countries are not postmaterial in any sense; they are rather livelihood struggles with clearly defined material grievances that weave red and green concerns together (Baviskar 2005, 1997). The structural problems and chronic poverty in a developing country context should be taken into consideration while understanding the material aspects of these ecological struggles. The model of resource-intensive development has led to the narrowing down of the natural resource base for the survival of the economically poor and powerless, left with no choice but to mobilise against the mass dispossession of their means to livelihood (Shiva 1991).

Baviskar (1997) argues that in the case of Indian environmental movements, struggles over nature have an inherent class dimension because nature also provides resources that are the bases of production.[6] The unexamined presumption, she argues, that conflict over forest and water is environmental whereas that over agricultural land is not stems from the class background of the scholars, who tend to see forests and rivers as 'wilderness' rather than primarily as a source of livelihood. The inseparability of – and continuity between – 'red' and 'green' agendas is emphasised by Ramachandra Guha (1989). He observes that ecological specificities limit and modify social relations; a better understanding of movements should consequently include the economic landscape and ecological landscape within which it is placed (Guha 1989).

Apart from the confluence of material and ideational aspects of natural resource conservation, the environmentalism of the poor offers an active rebuttal to the dominant idioms, concepts and indicators of

economic development (Karan 1994). Exploring this proposition in the context of Indian environmental movements, Bandyopadhyay and Shiva (1988) point out that:

> The ecology movements that have emerged as major social movements in many parts of India are making visible many invisible externalities and pressing for their internalisation to the economic evaluation of the elite-oriented development process. In the context of a limited resource base and unlimited development aspirations, the ecology movements have initiated a new political struggle for safeguarding the interest and survival of the poor, the marginalised, among whom are women, tribals and the poor peasants. (Bandyopadhyay and Shiva 1988, 224)

As the excerpt explicates, many such environmental movements have strong social justice orientations that challenge the distribution of environmental inequality in the immediate surroundings of people and have a direct impact on their everyday lived experiences (Karan 1994; Dwivedi 2001; Shiva 1991; Gadgil and Guha 1994, 1995). Such traits make these movements different from the mainstream environmental movements that are values-centred and organised around universalistic demands. Exploring the North–South distinctions, Dwivedi observes how the difference in approach between the South and the North centres around

> the preference for a *political economy approach* to resource distribution and use in the former as opposed to either an *organisational or NSM approach* in the North. In the case of southern movements, equity issues feature as important as sustainability and efficiency. (Dwivedi 2001, 16) [author's italics]

Comparing the environmental movements in India and the US, Gadgil and Guha (1994) observe that many environmental conflicts in developing countries are part of economic conflicts, which also translates into their chosen mode of action. In short, the extensive literature on environmental movements in countries such as India highlights the poor and working-class origins of environmental movements and the confluence of material and ecological grievances in their protest vocabularies.

The agenda

There are no systematic explorations of labour-environmental conflicts in a context where both are constituted within similar social standing. Except for the studies by Liu (2015) and Huan (2014), the relationship between labour and environmental movements remains largely unexamined in the South Asian context. Systematic inquiries into the relationship between labour and environmental movements in India are limited (with the exception of Baviskar 1995). More importantly, none of the current studies try to connect the study of labour-environmental conflict to the larger scholarship on social movements, particularly in postcolonial settings. Apart from Liu's (2015) study that explores the differences in the power bases of the two movements, which focuses largely on movement sequencing, few studies probe into the differences in mobilising structures, protest strategies, ideologies, framing processes and grievance interpretation or emotions while trying to explain labour-environmental conflicts. Trying to fill this lacuna in the literature, this book seeks to explore the conflict between labour and environmental movements using the framing perspective.

Current studies either focus on structural factors or narrowly focus on individual movement attributes. In so doing they create a wedge in the literature that could be bridged only by combining structural and individual factors. In this book I aim to explore labour-environmental conflicts by uncovering the frame disputes (Benford 1993a) between the two movements, attending both to the framing processes at the level of the individual participants and the role of structural factors in influencing the frames produced and collective identities constructed by movement participants. I focus on the processes underlying the production of contradictory realities and the construction of opposing frames in the labour-environmental conflict. In this book I closely examine the framing processes that underlie the production of competing frames between the two movement groups, in addition to the role of structural factors (such as class, political economy) in the construction of individual movement frames and collective identities (Benford and Snow 2000; Hunt and Benford 2004).

In short, in a social context where poor and working-class people largely organise environmental movements, conflict between labour and environmental movement becomes a stand-off between two movements constituted by people from the same social class. As explicated in the above review, existing theories on labour-environmental conflicts fall short in comprehensively addressing the conflict involving

environmental movements that are markedly constituted by the poor and working-class. Class-based interests and class-based cultures fail to be explanatory factors when working-class participants constitute both these movements.

Many ongoing issues of labour-environmental conflicts in countries such as India call for new theoretical perspectives that move beyond the traditional and generative class-based binaries. Only a comprehensive approach that considers the political economy of development, economic growth and the nexus between labour and capitalist forces can reveal the dynamics of labour-environmental conflicts in the Global South. Despite the enduring presence of conflicts between working-class trade unions and environmental movements, the issue remains largely unexamined in the context of the Global South. Furthermore, the absence of ethnographic and qualitative inquiries into the nature and dynamics of inter-movement relations in the context of Global South pre-empts the inclusion of voices and cases from the margins to the centre of social research on labour-environmental conflicts.

In this context, the present book seeks to expand the existing literature on labour-environmental conflicts by exploring the factors that produce conflictual relationships between labour and green movements in India, in circumstances where both of these movements are composed of working-class participants. Relying on a case that directly challenges the extant conceptions of labour-environmental conflicts, I explore the puzzle in the context of Kerala, a South Indian state with a population of 34.8 million. This inquiry aims to expand the scholarship on social movements by bringing postcolonial movements and settings to the centre of social inquiry.

Theoretical approach and interdisciplinary orientations

Sociology has actively contributed to uncovering the processes that underlie the origin and growth of social movements, ranging from structural and rationalist analyses to social constructionist and cultural approaches (Della Porta and Diani 2020). As has been made clear above, most of the existing research on labour and environmental conflicts has largely confined its analysis to structural factors (class, economic and political factors), overlooking the role of individual grievance interpretations, cultural aspects, emotions or the dialectics between structural and individual factors in explaining the conflicts between labour and environmental movements. Even when the studies have relied on structural

factors, no attempt has been made to integrate these findings into the theories of social movement research, such as resource mobilisation or political process model. Instead they stand alone, in a separate niche of studies exploring labour-environmental relations.

There are no systematic inquiries into the processes that articulate the framing and counterframing around the conflicts between the two movement groups. The scope for examining inter-movement dynamics, framing processes and the linkages between structural factors and movement-frames all make the case of immense potential for social movement research. I employ frame analysis to uncover the framing processes[7] and frame-disputes[8] between the movements (Benford 1993a; Benford and Snow 2000). This assists in bringing forth competing frames or frame-disputes between the two groups. Being a perspective that has 'lent itself to addressing and synthesizing static and dynamic dimensions of social movements', frame analysis enables the researcher to examine the processes by which grievances are 'constructed, contested and disseminated (*framing*) as well as describe, assess and compare the products of those interactions or ideational work (*frame*)' (Snow et al. 2014, 30).

In addition, the location of the issue within the backdrop of industrial capitalism, and in a state with a very long communist history, provides an excellent opportunity to reintroduce capitalism into social movement research and to understand the effects of neoliberal capitalism on the relationship between contemporary social movements (Hetland and Goodwin 2013; Della Porta 2015). The project makes contributions to the critique of economic development and growth, environment, the political left and development studies.

Furthermore, this text is informed by a combination of constructionist and post-Marxian theoretical approaches including critical theory, Marxian ecology (O'Connor 1988; Foster 2000) and treadmill of production (Gould et al. 1996). Such approaches help in situating the project within the context of the expanding capitalist accumulation and its effects on the environment. Here I employ a political ecology lens to analyse the situated nature of environmental issues within differential fields of power and politics; this in turn helps to explore the processes that underlie the unequal distribution of environmental burdens among the working-class (Peet and Watts 2004). The present study generously draws from postcolonial theory (Haynes and Prakash 1992; Chakrabarty 2000) to move beyond the domain of class interests while understanding and explaining the conflict between labour and environmental movements in a postcolonial setting.

Research context

Kerala has a unique history of communist governments and egalitarian politics that is well represented in scholarly literature (Jeffrey 1992; Franke and Chasin 1994; Heller 1999). The working-class struggles and redistributive policies played an instrumental role in creating what is now known as the 'Kerala Model of Development' (Drèze and Sen 2002) – a model with moderate economic growth and very high social indicators. The trajectory of labour and environmental movements in the state makes it an excellent context in which to explore the conflict between these two groups.

The labour movements in the state, which started off as anti-capitalist (class) struggle, later embraced the politics of class compromise with capital and furthered accumulationist strategies of development in the state (Heller 1995). According to Heller, this transformation of politics has conferred upon labour the status of 'agent of development' (Heller 1999). However, the proliferation of subaltern and working-class environmental movements[9] in the state serves to challenge the monolithic narratives surrounding the 'Kerala model' from the standpoints of environmental justice and resource access rights (Kurien 1995; Raman 2010; Satheesh 2017). These environmental movements pose active challenges to the model of resource-intensive development that labour strives to promote in the state. Despite extensive discussions about the vindication of labour movements, few scholars have discussed the effects of labour mobilisation on other social movements. Moreover, they fail to consider how the shifting class politics of labour has affected other lower-class movements.

A unique model of development, the transformation of labour politics and the advent of environmental movements against this model make the inquiry into the relationship between labour and environment significant in the context of Kerala. There are no systematic studies that explore the interactions between these two movements in the region, so the present work fills this gap in the literature. It also makes original contributions to the study of labour-environment interactions from a developing country perspective by contextualising the labour-environmental relations beyond class-based explanations. The findings of this research, grounded in a social context lauded for its communist orientations, add to the debates and discussions around labour, nature and capitalism.

Chapter overview

In this book I study the conflicts between labour and environmental movements in Kerala. Relying on an analysis of movement frames and individual movement actors' interpretations, I explore how structural and individual factors intersect to determine the relationship between labour and environmental movements in Kerala. My primary objective in this project focuses on two aspects: firstly, the structural and individual factors that create a conflictual relationship between labour and green movements; secondly, the framing-processes and frame-disputes between the two movement groups. Building on the research objectives and grounded in the dominant themes that have emerged during the analysis, the upcoming chapters are organised to answer the following questions:

- How do structural and political-economic factors such as capitalism and the state-capitalist nexus influence the conflicts between labour and green movements?
- How can we explain labour-environmental movements when working-class participants constitute both these movements?
- What are the dominant themes in the frame-disputes between labour and green movements in Kerala? What influence do ideologies have in creating and accentuating the frame-disputes between the two movements?

In Chapter 2 I lay out the methodological approach underlying this project. The chapter introduces the settings, movements, actors and varied methods used in this inquiry. It then explicates the rationale behind adopting a hybrid approach to ethnography, drawing from the extended case method and constructivist grounded theory. Aside from detailing the setting and the varied methods and strategies used in this project, I reflect on the issues of objectivity and positionality and its possible influences on research design and analysis. Moreover, this chapter explicates the ways in which it strives to decentre and decolonise the process of knowledge production by resituating the focus on a post-colonial setting. In doing so, it also seeks to address some issues involved while researching the left, environment and social movements in Kerala from a critical standpoint.

Chapter 3 sets the backdrop for understanding labour-environmental conflicts in the Eloor-Edayar region. In this chapter I offer a brief overview of the history of industrialisation in the Eloor-Edayar

industrial belt. Using interviews and oral history narratives, this chapter maps the origins of the local environmental movement, explaining how its emergence can be explained as a response to environmental grievances resulting from industrial pollution. In addition, the chapter illuminates the conditions that led to the emergence of the local environmental movement and maps the process of mobilisation. It presents a periodisation of the local environmental movement, marking periods of emergence, growth and decline. In doing so, the text reaffirms the importance of grievances in engendering social movements, especially in the context of issues such as environmental pollution, where the grievances often interfere with daily lives, causing quotidian disruption.

In Chapter 4 I examine the influence of industrial capitalism on social movement mobilisation processes in Kerala. Adding to ongoing discussions surrounding capitalism and social movements, this chapter uncovers an empirical case study illuminating the operations of capitalist forces in a postcolonial movement landscape. Drawing upon interviews, oral histories and documents, I examine how the political economy of industrial development and a variant of crony capitalism, characterised by the nexus between the state, trade unions and capitalists, impact the social movement landscape in the region. Grounded in the frames and narratives of movement actors, the chapter expounds the strategies deployed by local industries to co-opt the leadership of trade unions, pump capital into the landscape of mobilisation and successfully manufacture consent among local people. Most importantly, this chapter highlights how capital buys participation by introducing monetary incentives and constrains the local environmental activism of factory workers using the trope of 'job blackmail'. In addition, the chapter embellishes how the monopoly over monetary resources or 'capital' attributes unique privileges to industrial capitalists over resource-poor environmental movements in the movement field. Such operations of capital highlight the need to move beyond the traditional perspective of resource mobilisation that overlooks the structural inequality in the distribution of resources. The findings of this chapter highlight the importance of situating studies on postcolonial environmental movements within the backdrop of capitalism, the political economy of development and a hegemonic coalition between the state, capitalists and unions.

In Chapter 5 I examine the tensions between labour and green movements in the Eloor-Edayar industrial belt, despite belonging to similar class backgrounds. The chapter explicates the continued tensions between the two movements relying on two aspects: firstly, the heterogeneity of working-class and workers' interest; secondly, the shift in

labour politics in Kerala. Analysing the use of workers' grievances in the movement frames and interpretations, I illustrate how the two movements employ the interests of workers to legitimise their movement goals. When greens legitimise their movements, highlighting the fallouts of industrial pollution on inland fish-workers and farmworkers, the unions fight against pollution regulation, citing the economic interests of factory workers. The presence of workers' interests on either side of the conflict challenges reductive and universal conceptions of working-class as a single category. In doing so it uncovers how the economic interests of different types of workers are contingent upon sectoral location, resource dependence and the embeddedness within the political economy of industrial development.

Additionally, this chapter explains the ongoing tensions in the backdrop of the shift in labour politics in Kerala. I use the class compromise between labour and capital to explicate the antagonism between these movements, despite their belonging to backgrounds of similar class. In addition, highlighting the contested interpretations of class and class-consciousness, this chapter reveals the polarised understandings and interpretations by distinguishing between inclusive and exclusive definitions of left-wing politics. I argue that the competing interpretations surrounding communism and left politics produced by green movements and unions signify the divide between radical and reformist versions of left-wing politics operating in Kerala.

In Chapter 6 I uncover the frame-disputes between labour and environmental movement in the Eloor-Edayar industrial belt. Focusing on the opposing and competing frames constructed by the two movement groups surrounding the issue of pollution, this chapter investigates how structural factors and varied ideologies of development influence the micromobilisation processes of social movements. The chapter also explains labour-environmental conflicts as a clash between ideas and realities, in which the movements engage in an ontological dispute regarding the existence and causes of industrial pollution. The analysis of movement frames and discussions here also serves to illuminate the ideological disputes surrounding environment, development and economic growth that underlie the frame-disputes between the two movements. Furthermore, the chapter also identifies how the unions' ideological roots are ingrained in the lexicons of economic growth, whereas the green movement is guided by the ethos of environmental justice, resource rights and sustainability.

Chapter 7 explains how the union collective fits the definition of countermovement and analyses the counterframes. Most importantly,

the chapter presents the implications of the counterframes created by the union collective in discrediting, demobilising and delegitimising the green movement. The chapter uncovers how the counterframing tactics used by the unions, which have labelled environmental activists as 'pseudo-environmentalists', 'anti-developmentalist' and 'extremists', seek to repress the local environmental movement.

In Chapter 7 I offer a summary of the major findings discussed in previous chapters. I then discuss the implications of this study for social movement theory and research, identifying its limitations and delineating future research.

The Epilogue brings the River Periyar into the centre of discussion and engages in a philosophical contemplation of the arguments presented in previous chapters.

Notes

1 The use of Global South in this project is not intended as a sweeping label that reduces the social movement dynamics (Almeida 2019) across the countries in the Southern hemisphere, nor to erase the social and cultural diversity of the people and settings. Instead it is used as a term to convey the similitude in nature and characteristics of the local environmental movements organised by poor and marginalised people.

2 In his later work Obach points out that 'the cultural gap identified by others is better understood as a manifestation of organisational differences rooted in legal and structural pressures as opposed to class culture' (Obach 2004a: 24).

3 Huan (2014) explores the confluence of red and green movements in the Chinese context and points out that labour and environmental movements in China have not taken steps to interact or promote ties with each other. Huan argues that the inherent ideological conflict between 'ecologism' and 'socialism' makes the formation of an alliance between labour and environmental movements difficult if not impossible. According to him, the formation of an alliance in the Chinese context is determined neither by political openness nor the willingness of individual movements for collaboration; it is rather contingent upon the historical process of Chinese modernisation stage and choices of the CPC (Communist Party of China) and the Chinese government. Here the author highlights the role of context-specific structural and political-economic factors in determining the nature of relationship between labour and environmental movements.

4 As a matter of fact, the history of environmental movements in a country such as India can be dated back to the forest conflicts during the colonial time period. In so doing this challenges the claims of 'newness; upheld by contemporary 'New Social Movements' (Guha 1989; Bandyopadhyay and Shiva 1988).

5 This is not to overlook the struggles for environmental justice in the United States or other developed countries, where marginalised communities fight against the unequal distribution of environmental burdens. This will be discussed in greater detail in Chapter 5. However, the extant research on labour-environmental conflicts does not feature cases including the environmental justice movements.

6 According to O'Connor, the meanings attributed to nature are not exhausted by its use as natural resource; ecological politics are about 'class issues even though they are more than class issues' (O'Connor 1988, 37, as cited in Baviskar 1997, 40).

7 Frame analysis represents the social constructionist approach to the study of social movements. The concept frame used here is derived from the work of Goffman (1974, 21) who defines frames as 'schemata of interpretation' that enable individuals to 'locate, perceive, identify,

and label' occurrences within their life space and world at large. Frames are crucial to social movements as they guide individual and collective action. According to Benford and Snow (2000), framing is 'an active, processual phenomenon that implies agency and contention at the level of reality construction' (Benford and Snow 2000, 614).

8 However, not all movements share the same frame or interpretation of reality. Frame-disputes between social movements emerge over such disparate interpretation of reality (Benford 1993a).

9 These environmental movements are part of the larger oppositional movements that have emerged against the redundant class politics of labour that precludes concerns related to gender, ecology, caste and sexualities.

2
Methodology

> It is the task of methodology to explicate methods of turning observations into explanations, data into theory. (Burawoy 1991, 5)

This chapter lays out the methodological approach that underlies this book. In it I will explain the rationale behind the choice of setting, methods of research, data sources and analytic tools used as part of this inquiry. I show how the ethnographic methods used in this project entail a hybrid approach, informed by a combination of the extended case method and constructionist grounded theory. In addition to detailing the setting, as well as varied methods and strategies used in this project, I also consider issues of objectivity and positionality and their influence on the research process. Moreover, I reflect on the ways in which this project strives to decentre and decolonise the process of knowledge production by resituating the focus of theory building from a postcolonial setting. In doing so, this chapter also seeks to address certain issues involved while researching the left, environment and social movements in Kerala from a critical standpoint.

The setting: Eloor-Edayar industrial belt

The study was conducted in the Eloor-Edayar industrial belt, the 24th most polluted industrial zones in India (Nambudiri 2017; Perinchery 2019). The industrial zone, which is the largest industrial belt in Kerala, spans across Eloor and Edayar, a municipality and a village in Koothattukulam, respectively. Situated in the Ernakulam district, Eloor is an island on the River Periyar located almost 17 km (10.56 miles) from

Cochin. Describing the geography of the setting, Ravi, a trade union leader, remarked:

> Eloor, the present Municipality, an old Panchayath, is actually an island that is surrounded by the River Periyar. Bridges connect this land to the mainland ... we have almost 11 bridges connecting us to the outside ... this is an island. (Ravi, personal interview, 16 May 2018)

A region surrounded by the River Periyar and many small streams and canals, the Eloor-Edayar region formed the setting for this study. Home to more than 247 chemical industries, the region was declared as a 'toxic-hotspot' in a study published by Greenpeace (Greenpeace 2003). As a site of pollution, the Eloor-Edayar industrial belt also made it into the EJ (Environmental Justice) Atlas in 2014 (Patra 2014; Temper et al. 2015). Many scientific and academic studies have explored the issue of pollution here, as well as the inaction of local elected bodies in curbing the same (Stringer et al. 2003; LAEC 2006; NIIST 2011; *Times of India* 2012; Devika and Narayanan 2019; Joseph 2020).

My field trips also illustrated the extent to which industries became an integral part of the place and its identity. A place named Binanipuram, named after Binani Industries that operated from the region before being closed down recently, or the junction named after 'company' signify how the lives and livelihoods of the people are embedded within the lexicons connected to local industries. The region was often referred to as an 'industrial graveyard' by the union leaders as they discussed the decline of industrial growth in the region. A bus journey from Ernakulam to Eloor would run through this 'graveyard'; remnants of old and corroded plants and housing complexes constructed by industries could be seen entangled in creepers and vegetation. However, the trip also gives a sense of an enduring industrial hub, with major public industries such as FACT, IRE and TCS lining the sides of the road to the Eloor bus depot. As I started to discover the place better, lamentations regarding the demise of industries became more complex. With the help of a local worker, working in a bone mill factory, I saw the interior of an industrial unit that processed animal bones into fertiliser. My visit to the region not only exposed the extent of industrial growth along the banks of the River Periyar; it also illustrated the abysmal working conditions of workers in some of these private industries.

Interestingly, the visits conveyed how the decline of public industries has been compensated for by a new surge in private industries.

Many of the latter employ workers with limited income and benefits who are forced to endure abysmal and unsafe conditions. The visits also illustrated the decline of permanent factory jobs, now replaced with temporary and contractual work and a larger influx of migrant workers. The combination of interviews, field observations and documents helped to establish a systematic model of data collection enabling triangulation (Geertz 2004; Lofland and Lofland 2006).

I relied on theoretical sampling (Breckenridge and Derek 2009; Glasser and Strauss 2017) to identify the case[1] 'specific' enough to meet the characteristics and theoretical constructs mandated in my questions (Ragin 1992). The conflicts between the union collective and the local environmental movement in this setting fit the conceptual and theoretical questions laid out in the introduction. The unique history of working-class mobilisation in Kerala is marked by efforts to build political solidarity among members of the working class. These included teach-in sessions and study classes aimed at consciousness-raising and collective empowerment of local people.

Such group processes exposed and familiarised people to Marxian theory and concepts, to the extent that these terms and constructs carry interpretations deeply rooted in Kerala's social and cultural context. Moreover, the presence of public and private industries, the state-owned Kerala State Pollution Control Board (KSPCB) and the local movements created a unique combination of structural and political-economic factors – thereby aiding a process of inquiry that seeks to understand the interaction between political economy and individual factors in social movement mobilisation.

Researching labour-environmental conflicts: movements and participants

The study explores two social movement groups in the Eloor-Edayar region that are mobilised around the issue of industrial pollution. The local environmental movement is constituted by different local green groups, the most prominent of them being the Periyar Malineekarana Virudha Samithi (Periyar Anti-Pollution Committee, PMVS hereafter). The local environmental movement also includes two other green groups: Green Action Force and Janajagratha (People Vigilante). Green Action Force played an instrumental role in initiating a legal battle against the polluting companies in the region; Janajagratha emerged in a context where the frontline leaders of PMVS were selectively attacked

and victimised for fighting against pollution. The Standing Council of Trade Unions (SCTU) is the union collective featured in this study. SCTU is a collective organised by the major trade unions for factory workers in the industrial belt, initially to fight against the issue of rising energy prices. The collective remained dormant for a while, but was revamped when the local environmental movements intensified their fight against pollution. The present work examines the interactions between the green movement led by the PMVS and by SCTU, the trade union collective.

The participants featured in this study belong to these two respective movements. As mentioned above, the movements and movement actors were selected by theoretical sampling. A local Environmental NGO named Thanal provided entry to the field by introducing me to Kumar, the Research Coordinator of PMVS. Kumar *chettan* put me in touch with other members of the local environmental movement in the Eloor-Edayar industrial belt.

I also tried to gain access to members of SCTU, the trade-union collective. Initially I sought to gain entry and access to its members by going through the District Committee (DC hereafter) in my district, Kottayam. I requested the Secretary of the DC to introduce me to trade union leaders in the Eloor-Edayar industrial belt. When I summarised the project objectives during our first meeting, Kumar happily agreed to share the contact details of the trade union leaders in the region. I first contacted Padmanabhan, the Secretary of the SCTU, who put me in touch with other trade union leaders and members in the region. After being in touch with the leaders of the two organisations, subsequent participants were identified using snowball sampling. The frontline leaders of the two groups were extremely helpful in passing over information about potential participants for this study. To eliminate the bias in choosing members, and thus to increase the validity of the findings, the study used snowball sampling techniques (Noy 2008; Handcock and Gile 2011) to expand the sample of participants to include members not initially suggested by the frontline leaders.

However, as my research progressed, I experienced some difficulty in gaining entry into the labour movement. With some effort and perseverance, I was able to establish a degree of rapport with the leader of the union collective; this proved instrumental in opening the window to meet other union leaders. Despite gaining entry, however, my access to these settings was severely limited. Almost all union leaders maintained a very formal structure to their responses and, after the first few interviews, I realised that the construction of their responses was sounding very similar. By the middle of my initial schedule, I realised that union leaders

had been informed about my project and encouraged to be consistent in the responses they gave.

One industry in particular was quick to establish strong mechanisms of surveillance over my project via informal social networks; it also prevented access to its workers and union leaders. I was recorded and photographed during one such encounter, where a person randomly confronted me and started questioning me about my project and its alleged focus on this particular industry. I contacted union representatives in this industry, as I had many others. However, the union representatives working for this industry decided at the last minute not to part take in this study. They informed me that the decision to withdraw had been taken collectively by all unions in this particular industry.

Detailing the methods of research

I adopt a qualitative methodological approach in this project. This methodological choice is guided by the epistemological and ontological premises within which my research questions have grown and developed. A combination of ethnographic observations, in-depth interviews, ethnographic interviews and document analysis is used here. Most significantly, the ethnographic method used in this project relies on a combination of the extended case logic (Burawoy 1998, 2019; Burawoy et al. 2000) and constructivist grounded theory (Charmaz 2014). In other words, I employed both theory-driven (Lichterman 2002; Burawoy 2019) and grounded theory approaches while gathering data. Furthermore, building on Lichterman's (2002, 141) call to use multiple methods, I used observation and interviews to pursue questions surrounding the interaction between social and cultural structures and movements. Such a hybrid approach is important when examining the questions outlined in the preceding chapter concerning the intersection of structure and agency. The field research spanned a period of three months ranging from May to July 2018.

Types of interviews and interview strategies

A total of 38 movement actors were interviewed during the course of this project. Of the 38 participants, 19 participants signed the consent form and 19 participants provided verbal consent before taking part in the study. The participants included 36 respondents who identified as male

and two respondents who identified as female. The absence of women from the leadership position of the two movements is discussed further in Chapter 7.

All the interviews were conducted at locations chosen by the participants. The majority of the interviews with the environmental actors were conducted at their homes or during movement events, while interviews with union leaders were conducted in union offices. The interview sites varied from the Eloor-Edayar industrial region to the city of Ernakulam. All names used in this project are pseudonyms, though real names are also used in citing published articles written by participants. Many environmentalists and union members expressed interest in using their real names in the study. This request is reasonable, particularly in the context of social movements where movement actors are popular among the community. In addition, the prominence of the local environmental movement and its activists in mainstream and social media make concealing its actors' identity somewhat futile. However, in order to comply with the IRB regulations, pseudonyms are used while talking about all participants.

I used different interview strategies within each interview session to elicit information on multiple aspects pertaining to the conflict and processes of mobilisation. Oral history interview strategies and probes were used to 'elicit description of a historical period or situation from the perspective of those who lived through that time' (Blee and Taylor 2002, 102). Since oral history interviews shed light on the 'past periods of current social movements' (Staggenborg 1991; Blee and Taylor 2002, 102), this strategy was particularly helpful in reconstructing the history of industrialisation, the fight against pollution, the formation of collective identity, the emergence of movements, timeline of protests and collective action, specific instances of conflicts, etc.

The absence of documented evidence surrounding the history of conflicts between the two movement groups presented a major challenge to the initial research process. However, oral history interviews facilitated entry into these past events through the memories of participants. For example, many interviewees recollected how Kuhappan, a firebrand leader, had staged the first protest against the issue of pollution in Eloor by holding a sign saying 'Welcome to the Gas Chamber in Eloor'. That incident, a protest staged by a radical activist, marked the beginning of fights against pollution in the region, yet this catalyst is seldom present in the limited documents and media reports available on the movement. Similarly, many events that serve as crucial to understanding the emergence of the trade union collective or the unfolding of the

red-green conflicts (the inter-movement tensions between trade unions and local environmental movements) came up during the interviews. The collective memory of the people helped to reconstruct the history of the place, pollution and social movement mobilisation. The interview narratives from people belonging to opposing groups, such as the unions and the green movements, corroborated each other in building these shared remembrances of the past. Beyond these two movement groups, interviews with people living in the region helped to broaden the social base and location of participants to some extent. Collecting historical data based on multiple interviews and featuring the perspective of participants belonging to varied social groups and social positions (Blee and Taylor 2002; Janesick 2010) thus builds the validity of these narratives.

Such a step was crucial, considering the importance of comparing oral history accounts from differently situated persons or other sources in social movement research (Naples 1999). While discussing the utility of oral history interviewing for social movement research, Kathleen Blee and Verta Taylor observe that this strategy of interviewing serves 'as a technique of bridging, seeking to understand social contexts through stories of the individual experiences and to comprehend experiences of the past through stories of the present' (Blee and Taylor 2002, 102).

In addition to oral history accounts, the concept of 'life history interviewing' was also used to understand the mobilising experiences of individual members and their personal consequences – as well as to tease out interactions between the macro- and micro-processes of social movement mobilisation (Rubin and Rubin 1995). Situated within the tradition of ethnography and oral history, life history interviewing is a process 'designed to record an individual's biography' in his/her/their own words (Faraday and Plummer 1979; Heyl 2001; Jackson and Russell 2010, 172). This strategy aided comprehension of the ways in which structural factors influenced the construction of shared grievances, collective identities and frames within the two movement groups.

Apart from oral and life histories, the interviews also included semi-structured and ethnographic interview techniques. Distinguishing ethnographic interviews[1] (Heyl 2001) from other interviews is helpful as regards the methodological discussion of this project; I carefully picked these strategies depending on the social movement group that I was interviewing. For example, I relied upon ethnographic interviewing technique to gather the narratives of environmental movements to which I had gained immediate access; but relied almost exclusively on semi-structured interviews (almost invariably formal, with the exception of

one or two) with trade union members. Additionally, native language explanations are considered to be one among the important forms of ethnographic explanations (Spradley 2016, 59) that need to be sought during interviews. Being a native speaker has helped me in explaining and understanding the emotional, social and cultural contexts within which many of the responses are embedded.

Theory-driven participant observation

The participant observation research conducted here draws from Lichterman's (2002) idea of 'theory-driven participant observations' for studying movements. In the article titled 'Seeing structure happen', Lichterman suggests how participant observers can use the extended case logic to 'understand social movements in their ongoing relations to larger contexts' (2002, 142). Such an approach is capable of finding answers to theoretical questions surrounding social and cultural structures. Moreover, the combination of interviews and observations adopted here also derives from the author's suggestion to consider using multiple methods while exploring questions related to structure and social movements. In addition, a mixed-method approach helps to accomplish the triangulation (Flick 2004) of methods used in this project. I recorded observations in my field journal and later developed them into reflexive field notes (Lofland 2004; Emerson et al. 2011).

Apart from interviews, participant observations were conducted in and around the industrial region itself. This includes observations conducted on the River Periyar in a country boat (a type of small boat used for local transport in Kerala) on 6 July 2018. This trip covered the stretch of the river behind some of the most polluting industries, including PML and another industry that remained closed following an order from the state's Pollution Control Board (PCB) citing violation of pollution regulation. Observations of movement events include a campaign event in Edayar on 7 July 2018 (featuring speeches from local environmentalists as well as other leading environmentalists in Kerala) and a meeting organised in Ernakulam on 16 June 2018 by leading environmental and cultural organisations/movements in Kerala; its aim was to brainstorm the possibility of organising a collective protest against KSPCB. My trips to the industrial region included important sites repeated in the narratives such as Pathalam Regulator Bridge, company junction ('company padi'), Kuzhikandam Thodu ('canal'), the Periyar River and so on. Field observations and interviews were conducted

until the interviews contained repeated narration of the same incidents and themes, indicating theoretical saturation (Breckenridge and Jones 2009).

Document analysis: campaign materials, media reports and social media handles

Apart from ethnographic methods, the study also collected campaign materials produced by the two movement groups, among them posters, flyers, pamphlets, booklets and newsletters. In addition to these campaign materials I collected media reports on the issues of industrial pollution and labour-environmental tensions, as well as scientific reports produced by government agencies and civil society organisations on pollution's extent and impact. All the documents collected were coded and synchronised, based on key themes. The text relevant to the study contained around 1,000 pages and procedures of selective coding were employed for the government reports that ran to more than 150 pages. All the documents collected included around 500 pages, excluding the scientific study reports and media documents.

Video documentaries and online news discussions also formed part of the survey of media reports. Furthermore, the Facebook profile handles of prominent environmentalists were used to understand the online campaigns organised by the green movement. This method was not extensively used in the case of SCTU, as their online presence was more limited. Moreover, the Live feature on Facebook was often used by the green movement to live-stream collective action events and protest meetings; all these live videos were analysed and included as data in this inquiry. Such live-streaming also expanded the scope of ethnographic research to include virtual ethnographic methods and data (Hine 2000; 2008).

Coding and analysis

The major data sources used here consist of interview transcripts, field notes, media documents (print, social media and digital media), government documents, civil society reports and campaign materials of the two movement groups (flyers, booklets, brochures, pamphlets etc). The interviews were translated from Malayalam to English and transcribed before conducting the analysis. All the data were converted

to texts (including video documentaries and news discussions) (Gibbs 2014); these were then coded and analysed using traditional hand-coding techniques and NVivo.

The NCapture feature available within the NVivo software facilitated data scrapping from social media and news media websites. The data in the form of text were coded and analysed using a constructivist grounded theory approach to discover the dominant themes and patterns emerging from the data (Charmaz 2014). In the words of Charmaz, while a constructionist approach limits itself to the 'what' and 'how' questions, grounded theory engages not only with these questions but also addresses 'why' questions as well. Subjecting all the data to this method of analysis thus helped me to ask the 'what', 'why' and 'how' questions surrounding labour and environmental conflicts in the settings. I therefore followed the structure of coding, schemes and practices presented by Kathy Charmaz (2014). I conducted the line-by-line (Charmaz 2014, 124) coding firstly on all transcribed and translated data to identify the initial codes.

The initial phase of coding helped to identify the main ideas and codes. Once the initial coding was completed, I moved on to the second stage, 'focused coding' (139). Here I explored the possibilities of axial and theoretical coding to separate and sort the available data based on recurring codes and themes. Throughout the stages, analytic memos were used to embellish ideas about the codes, make comparisons, mark theoretical significance or sensitise concepts and direct further data-gathering (Charmaz 2014, 164)). Analysis of the data was guided by a combination of political economy and framing perspectives to identify the collective action frames constructed by the two movement groups, and subsequently to map the role of structural and ideological factors in creating the same.

In that respect, the project used a combination of inductive and deductive approaches to unearth dominant themes from the data. My document analysis (Bowen 2009) was largely inspired by the method of textual deconstruction employed in the works of Subaltern Studies scholars (Guha 1987; Oldenburg 1990). All the interviews were transcribed and translated. Throughout the transcription process steps were taken to ensure the quality of the transcripts (Poland 1995); a reflexive approach was also adopted to ensure attention was paid to the issues surrounding representation (Oliver et al. 2005).

Aside from interviews, video documentaries and news discussions were also transcribed. However, translating them from Malayalam into English posed unique challenges, arising from the possibility of

losing meanings and emotions in translation (Van Nes et al. 2010). As a non-native speaker of English who grew up in Kerala, language presented potential impediments in converting ideas into words. The validity of the findings (Cook and Campbell 2004) and the reliability of the data were ensured by use of a multi-method approach; this offered the opportunity to cross-check findings derived from data gathered from multiple methods and sources (Seale 2004). Such employment of a multi-method approach also facilitated triangulation.

Subjectivity and positionality in movement research

My experiences of growing up in Thiruvarppu, a village in Kerala on the banks of the River Meenachil, have deeply influenced my understanding of interaction between people and nature. My grandfather, an avid reader and a communist, used to take my brother and I for long walks along the unpaved village roads. More than just walks, these excursions into nature were intertwined with stories about the history of the place, its people and the environment. Through stories my grandparents brought the past to life, filled with detailed accounts of how their lives were shaped by the local environment. Quite unknowingly, nature formed the rich backdrop of my lived experiences; it shaped my memories as a child and continues to influence my thoughts and imaginings about the future.

The local ecology was deeply embedded in stories describing the daily lived experience of my grandparents, ranging from swimming across the river to planting orchards and processing grains, yuca and yams. These stories also were laden with the dynamics of caste, class and gender in Kerala's history. They included references to the land reform policy implemented by the first communist ministry and its manifestations in the region. All these narratives vivified nature – not just as a pristine environment, but also as a source of livelihood, like the commons, as well as the site of conflicts.

My own lived experiences in the village brought me closer to nature in terms of the extensive time I spent wandering through the orchards, the giant Colocasia leaves under which we hid as we played hide and seek, the repeated floods that I saw, and many more. The old well at the end of our *muttam* (courtyard) had walls lined with green moss; its soft, satin-like texture always invited us to run our hands over it. My childhood memories of playing outside are laden with images of the red spinach orchard next to the small brick wall that separated the courtyard

from the compound, surrounded by coconut trees, plantains and yams. One could argue that my idea of nature is ingrained within the built environment – an environment created and modified by people.

However, the stories swiftly changed as I grew up. The ecology was transformed in front of my eyes, for instance when the water in our wells, 'water that used to be as clean as an eye drop', in the words of my grandmother, was suddenly replaced with red and muddy water. The privilege of class helped my family to install a water filter to circumvent the problem of muddy water in our taps, and so pretend that the issue had never happened. My father laid clay tiles on top of our roofs, enabling us to endure the scorching summer heat. My grandmother now complains over the phone about dust from the ongoing roadworks taking place in front of our home. The public works department is raising the roads that were destroyed in the deluge of 2018, so that it can survive any future floods.

Such changes in my immediate environment, or the places that I have always known, influence my inquiries into the impact of socio-environmental issues on people and communities. In other words, the centrality of nature in all these stories and experiences has been carried forward to my life as a scholar and continues to shape my research interests. As I sit writing about this project, undertaken almost 25 years after I went on those nature walks, I realise how these memories and experiences form an integral part of my identity as a scholar studying postcolonial environmental issues and environmental movements.

The idea of this project consequently stems from the experiential knowledge and lived experiences (Smith 1992) that surround the interaction between people and nature in a postcolonial setting. In doing so, I recognise the important role played by natural resources in facilitating and constraining everyday life. Furthermore, the project is grounded in my observations, both as an insider and an outsider (Collins 1986; Naples 1996). The remainder of this project and inquiries are guided by these lived experiences in Kerala, as well as by my training in American sociology. So it would be a mistake not to acknowledge the influence that my subjective experiences and lived experiences may have had on the conception and design of this book.

However, acknowledging my positionality and critical standpoint should not erode the legitimacy of the scientific data surrounding pollution that this work presents. Nor should the use of postmodern sensibilities here imply that the material reality of pollution or environmental grievances, as experienced by the people in the Eloor-Edayar region, is debatable. In other words, in spite of my focus on frame-disputes or the

contested interpretations surrounding pollution, I do not venture into portraying these disputing frames as two alternative realities, having equal standing. This project rests on the ontological reality of 'industrial pollution in Eloor-Edayar region'; it does not seek in any way to negate decades of struggle undertaken by people at the margins to produce rigorous scientific evidence. Rather, this book endeavours to understand the complexities and underlying factors that influence the ways in which social movement groups and individuals construct opposing claims and narratives surrounding the same event – or pollution in this context.

It is also important to reflect on the ways in which my social location has affected the process of research and data collection. My position as a divorcee, born into an upper caste and living with my upper-middle-class family, might have influenced the interviews and observations I conducted. Despite practising reflexivity, the privilege ingrained in my status and positionality would significantly affect my ability to understand and relate to the complexity of experiences narrated during the interviews, particularly the operation of intersectional systems of oppression and stratification. In addition, my social location might also limit me from forming extensive relationships based on trust, especially considering the historical violence unleashed by casteism and Brahmanical patriarchy (Chakravarti 1993; Omvedt 2000). More importantly, as a researcher, I had the ability to take myself away from the setting when I ended my field research. In contrast, the participants of this study have their lives and livelihoods ingrained in the system of production and local pollution.

Since the majority of the participants in this study identified as men, gender structured the dialogues and situations in unique ways (Arendell 1997). Navigating the field as a divorcee and single mother also produced interactions in which some participants interpreted my identity as 'deviant'. After the issue had recurred in a number of my initial interviews, I developed a strategy in which I avoided responding to questions about my relationship status.

Decolonising research on environment, development and social movements

Since the book is designed and operationalised from the standpoint of environmental justice and sustainability, the discussions it contains appear to be – and can be interpreted as being – sympathetic to the issue of environmental sustainability. The project adopts a critical standpoint

to understand the environmental damage created as a result of economic growth and development. Moreover, this book is committed to bringing movements from the margins, particularly those surrounding discussions on environment and development, into the centre of the mainstream literature on movements.

This is in no way an attempt to 'be the voice' of the environmental movement actors or union members, but rather to retell the stories they were kind enough to share with me. As a researcher, I am mindful and concerned about the epistemic violence (Spivak 1988) involved in 'giving voice', or claiming to represent the voice of the people that I studied. Such an approach is significant considering the lack of representation of voices or movements organised by people excluded by the dominant model of development from mainstream academic discourse on this subject (Shiva 1991; Peet and Watts 1993; Sachs 1997; Escobar 2011). Against this backdrop, this study also strives to explain the need to reinterpret these environmental movements as ontological disputes, seeking to challenge the reality of 'progress and prosperity' associated with the idioms and practices of development (Shiva 2014). Moreover, a focus on experiences and stories of people outside the Western contexts is important in decolonising (Rodriguez et al. 2016; Go 2017; Connell 2018) the process of sociological knowledge production.

However, this does not imply that the integration of experiences of development and movements into Western academia is required to provide legitimacy to these struggles or experiences. The movements that I study have a long history of mobilisation and collective action experiences and outcomes; I am not sure whether this project will provide any real and tangible benefits to the lives of those who participated in this study. Instead, I argue that these experiences would help in decentring and decolonising the process of academic knowledge production, and ultimately break the Eurocentric understandings that surround development and social movements.

Postcolonial movements, settings and ethnography

This project focuses on a postcolonial setting and two postcolonial movements. An empirical inquiry into the mobilisation processes of movements in the Global South is pertinent, bearing in mind the near-total absence of postcolonial movements from the theorisation of mainstream social movements. Apart from a few studies exploring the

dynamics of social movements in India (Shah 2004; Ray and Katzenstein 2005, Agarwala 2006; Nair 2016), the experience of movement mobilisation, particularly the issues around grievance interpretation, is largely missing from the mainstream literature.

The claims about the generalisability of many of these theories across settings are problematic, considering the exclusive focus on Western settings and cases. One of the primary mandates of this project is to expand the scope of movement studies in order to include movements from the Global South. The history of colonial domination and modernisation, and its reverberations felt through the postcolonial development projects, define the context for understanding postcolonial societies and movements. To fill this void in the extant literature, this text seeks to understand the interactions between two social movements in Kerala, a South Indian state with a unique history.

This book adopts a combination of political economy and social constructionism. In doing so, its analysis of the production of meanings and interpretations is informed by a postcolonial reading of sociological theories (Bhambra 2007, 2010, 2011; Patil 2013, 2007; Go 2013). Awareness of the continuities of colonial modernities and sensibilities (Agarwal and Sivaramakrishnan 2003) embedded within the dominant theories and methods will assist in working towards the creation of an alternative sociology (Smith 1987, 1990, 1999) – one that brings postcolonial experiences and movements to the centre of the field. Building on Bhambra's (2016) call to undertake a postcolonial reflection of sociology, this project aims to see whether the mainstream theories of labour-environmental conflicts and social movements can explicate the case of labour-environmental conflicts in the Eloor-Edayar industrial belt.

In doing so I do not plan to commit the same mistake, in which I reduce 'postcolonial setting and movements' into a single, homogenous experience. Though this study does not undertake an in-depth inquiry into the diverse experiences and axes of inequality (caste, gender, class and sexuality) that prevail in postcolonial India, the study design is extremely mindful of these differential experiences and movements, pointing out the need for future research. The aim here is therefore not to uncover grandiose theories or findings that would hold true across diverse social contexts and cultures. Instead, it is to see the extent to which mainstream theories can (or cannot) aid the process of understanding movement mobilisation in the setting.

Note

1 Heyl (2001, 369) defines ethnographic interviewing in the context of projects where 'researchers have established respectful, on-going relationships with their interviewees, including enough rapport for there to be a genuine exchange of views and enough time and openness in the interviews for the interviewees to explore purposefully with the researcher the meanings they place on events in their worlds'.

3
The production of a crisis: industrialisation and the emergence of the local environmental movement

This chapter sets the backdrop for an understanding of labour-environmental conflicts in the Eloor-Edayar region. In this chapter I trace the advent of industrial development in the region and explain how industrial pollution has affected the local ecology and created adverse health impacts for people living in the region. Availability of common pool resources such as water from Periyar and access to subsidised electricity played an instrumental role in making the region the site of local industrial development. Relying on oral histories, movement archives, campaign materials, documents and interviews, I reconstruct the experiences of people and their everyday struggles as they navigate the consequences of industrial pollution.

The narratives surrounding the ill effects of pollution also tell the story of a river that is dying. While weaving the history of local industrialisation and the environmental destruction that ensued, I trace the origin of local environmental action, identify its distinct phases and map the mobilisation process. Inquiries into conditions reaffirm the significance of grievances, environmental threats and quotidian disruption in engendering movements against industrial pollution as the ill effects brought people's daily lives to a standstill. Additionally, prior organisational experiences of the frontline leaders of the environmental movement played a prominent role in aiding the movement's diffusion and spread. Moreover, I argue that the political and economic conditions faced by the green movement can best be described using a hybrid-environment model of movement emergence. Such a model is characterised by both opportunities and threats, illustrating how the conditions changed from being favourable to unfavourable over time.

Introduction

I was staring into the abyss, occupying a window seat on a bus taking me to the Eloor-Edayar industrial belt, when I heard the conductor saying 'Company padi, company padi'. This place name speaks to how industries have made inroads into shaping the region's identity. Alerted to my soon approaching stop, I continued to stare through the window, but this time with more attention. An array of buildings, seemingly abandoned and dilapidated, but covered with lush green creepers as if someone had knitted the vines into a pattern, lined up by the road in intervals. I learned later that these were part of the complexes that had housed factory workers when local industrialisation was at its peak. Many factory buildings could also clearly be seen to have shut down and rusted. Their evident decay reminded me of something I had heard the previous day when conducting an interview with a union leader; the region is now 'an industrial graveyard'. Yes, these sights symbolise an era that witnessed the rise and fall of industries. However, they reveal little about what the region and its inhabitants had to deal with as the industries first prospered, then foundered. This chapter attempts to reconstruct this history of local industrialisation, and to explore how it affected the local ecology and everyday life in the region.

Industrial development as a vehicle of modernisation

An oral history account on the onset of industrialisation uncovers its entry into the region as a vehicle of modernisation – promising a path away from traditional modes of living to embrace a more modern, industrialised organisation of production and social life. This falls in line with existing writings on the history of the evolution of modern industrial units in Kerala. In tracing the history of the state's industrial structure, scholars have noted how the entry of modern industrial units into the state after the mid-1930s marked the beginning of a new era, in contrast to the previous phase which consisted only of traditional industries. The introduction of chemical industries into Kerala is perceived to be the result of a policy change in the Travancore administration that brought support to the development of large and medium-scale industries (Thomas 2005; Rammohan 1996; Isaac and Tharakan 1986). This shift in policy,[1] away from the revival of small-scale and cottage industries to encouragement for large-scale industries, combined with the availability of hydroelectricity, is considered as 'a potential basis of industrialisation' in

Travancore (Thomas 2005, 10). The Maharaja of Travancore, speaking at the opening ceremony of the Travancore Rubber Factory on 17 August 1935, reiterated his government's commitment to the industrial regeneration of the area:

> The needs of a growing population demand a supplementing of our income and our resources by the encouragement of industrial pursuits, more particularly as we possess an abundant supply of raw materials and are able to command cheap labour and transport facilities, not to mention the electric power which is available in sufficient quantities … My government will always be glad to lend their unstinted support to factory industries and large-scale production. (Sekhar 1938, 101–3).

In his speech the Maharaja defines the permanent 'bulwarks of national prosperity' in terms of people's health, strength, earning capacity and general standard of comfort. He also notes that, in order to sustain prosperity, it becomes imperative to supplement agrarian incomes with industrial endeavours. This history of economic evolution is largely reinforced and contextualised by oral history accounts collected during fieldwork. According to Madhu, a prominent trade union leader, the industrial area was developed under the Travancore princely rule. In recounting the history, he explained the context and described the sequence of events as follows:

> The industrial area was set up during the period of the Travancore King, as part of planned industrial development. We had started to generate electricity at Pallivasal using hydro power by then and the companies were promised cheap electricity, prices as low as 9 paise for each unit … That's what they offered the industries to come and operate in our state. I think the state was worried as to what they would do with all the surplus electricity generated from this project. So Sir. C. P. Ramaswamy, the Dewan of Travancore,[2] invited two companies to the state – the Indian Aluminum Company (ALCAN), which is a Canadian Company … and another one from Chennai, Sheshasaayi Business Group. These two companies were brought here. (Madhu, union leader, personal interview, 5 June 2018)

As the quote above points out, establishment of industries was inspired by a model of planned industrial development that was rationalised by the availability of cheap inputs, for example electricity[3] and water.

Seeking to exploit the favourable conditions, the Dewan of Travancore invited two companies, one foreign and one domestic, to form industries in the region. ALCAN was a foreign company and Sheshasaayi Business Group from Chennai the domestic enterprise. ALCAN later became Hindalco (previously known as the Hindustan Aluminum Corporation), while the Sheshasaayi company later transformed into the present Fertilizers and Chemicals Travancore Limited (FACT hereafter) (fieldnotes and interviews 2018; SCTU 2012, 2013). Incorporated in 1943 and started in the private sector, FACT later became a Public Sector Unit (PSU) in 1960. By 1962 the Government of India had become the major shareholder.[4] Encouraged by favourable production conditions including the availability of cheap energy, labour and raw materials, the influx of investment played a crucial role in transforming Kerala's industrial landscape. Apart from the supply of cheap electricity, the availability of common pool resources – most importantly, plentiful supplies of water – played an instrumental role in selecting Eloor-Edayar to be the site of local industrialisation in Kerala. The presence of the River Periyar[5] surrounding the proposed industrial region, which also enhanced accessibility to the sea port, influenced the decision to choose the region as the state's 'industrial capital'. An aerial photograph (Fig. 3.1) shows how the river flows right through the industrial belt, making it the perfect sink for factory effluents.

Highlighting the importance of water for industries, Krishnan, a trade union leader, elaborated on how the River Periyar played a strategic role in making the region a viable centre for industrialisation:

> So the location that was identified for the industries is almost at the edge of the River Periyar, where it joins the backwaters … They picked the riverside, and this was done by the Travancore King, the Diwan, and the governing body. Water is easily available and it was easy to reach electricity, so that's why the riverside of Periyar was chosen. Eloor, the present Municipality, an old Panchayath, is actually an island that is surrounded by the River Periyar … one of the longest rivers that runs to the west … So this direction of flow[6] from east to west also played an important part in choosing this region for the industrial area. (Krishnan, union leader, personal interview, 30 May 2018)

The strategic location of Eloor, an island surrounded by water bodies, was thus a decisive factor in making it the hub of local industries. This development marked the beginning of capitalist expropriation of natural

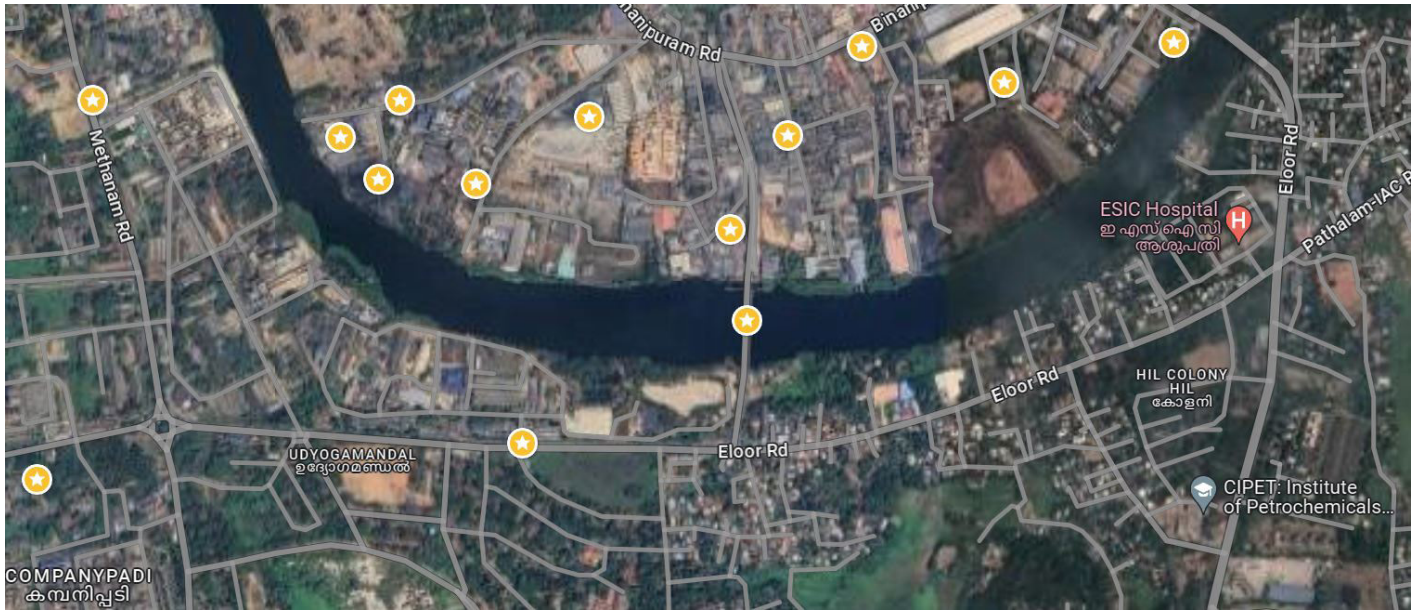

Figure 3.1 An aerial image of a section of the Eloor-Edayar industrial belt. It shows the River Periyar flowing through the region, as well as some chemical industries and Pathalam Regulator-Bridge. Source: Google Map. Imagery © 2024 Airbus, CNES / Airbus Maxar Technologies, Map data © 2024.

resources in the region. Industries generously tapped into the common pool resources, as they were 'free' and hence facilitated the accumulationist project (Yates 2018). Besides the suitability of the location in terms of being endowed with the forces of production, participants, particularly trade union leaders, interpreted the arrival of industries as a step towards modernisation. For example, in discussing the growth of industries and the subsequent social and economic changes in the region, another trade union leader observed:

> Before 1945 the Eloor-Edayar region remained underdeveloped … A group of underdeveloped islands surrounded by small streams and rivers. Later many development initiatives, including roads and bridges to Aluva and Ernakulam, electrification, schools, hospitals, etc. came to this region. The villagers who eked out a living from primitive agricultural practices and fisheries became factory workers, changing their lifestyle. The face of the place changed. The village atmosphere gave way to urban style and setting. The demography changed. People started having access to modern amenities. (James, union leader, personal interview, 7 June 2018)

The arrival of industries fostered local development in the form of modern infrastructure, enhancing connections to nearby towns and improving amenities such as electricity, schools and hospitals. As illustrated above, the process of development driven by industrialisation transformed the local economy and society; traditional agrarian practices (described as 'primitive' by James, the trade union leader) were replaced by more modern forms of production and work. This process of modernisation was in turn reflected in the shift in employment patterns, as people in the villages moved away from agrarian work to become factory workers in the new industries.

Furthermore, the process of modernisation transcended the realm of production and also began to affect the social organisation of life and local demography. Expounding the transition from agrarian to an industrial mode of production as an improvement has several parallels in history, where enclosing common land and the creation of private property served to create 'free' labour for the industries (Marx and Engels [1848] 1967; Lebowitz [1992] 2003, 125–40; Gorz 1997; Thier 2020). Moreover the expropriation of nature becomes more prominent for people involved in resource-dependent livelihoods, as the ill effects of pollution adversely affected their daily means of living.

In addition, the process of industrialisation in the Eloor-Edayar region echoes the history of modern development projects – along with the associated narratives that ostensibly frame capitalist developmentalism as the rescue route that brings 'progress' to so-called 'underdeveloped' regions. Clearly this dominant narrative articulates both modern industrialised modes of life and the organisation of production as more desirable than traditional rural and agrarian forms of production and social life. In other words, the history of industrialisation and regional transformation in Eloor closely illustrate how singular understandings surrounding development and progress translate into practice.

Smog, toxins and a river on fire

The zone soon expanded in scale and scope to house more than 400 chemical industries in and around the Eloor-Edayar region. Rapid expansion of industries led to a concomitant rise in the release of industrial effluents into the local ecology. What was promised as progress soon created negative environmental conditions and began to distribute pollution burdens among the local people. As the industries grew in number, the issue of pollution became visible in the form of smog, acute air pollution and a discoloured river. The section below documents the adverse environmental and health effects of industrial pollution in the words of those affected,[7] who recount horrific experiences in living with pollution.

'To Those Who Confirm the Death of Periyar', a booklet published by the *Periyar Malineekarana Virudha Samiti* (Periyar Anti-Pollution Committee) (PMVS 2012), lays out a detailed account of how pollution devastated local ecology by spewing gases into ambient air, filling the river with toxic chemicals and inflicting ill health[8] upon those living in the region. Environmentalists elaborated on the changing nature and composition of the river as follows:

> Periyar no longer remains the same. The Periyar of the 1940s had water available in plenty, but now the river flow has declined to almost 10 per cent of what it used to be in the 1980s. Our ancestors illustrated the strength of water currents in Periyar using analogies. They said the water currents in Periyar during monsoons were strong enough to chop off your index finger. To put it more scientifically, the river flow has dwindled from 257 cubic metres per second to a meagre nine cubic metres per second over the years. In other

> words, the death of Periyar has become a reality. Around five crore [a unit of measurement in India, with 1 crore equalling around 10 million] litres (approximately 185, 818 gallons) of treated and partially treated industrial effluents reach Periyar every day. This river does not have the ability to dilute all these pollutants. In fact it has ended up being a poisonous river, a river laden with toxins. (PMVS 2012)

Local environmentalists were vocal about how the mindless dumping of toxic effluents into the River Periyar has resulted in its death.[9] The narratives they gave were emotional, laden with feelings of loss and despair as they described the destruction of a river that had once played an integral part in their daily lives. Maqbool, a frontline leader of the PMVS, became emotional and nostalgic as he recollected memories of the river and reflected on its changing course. He remarked:

> I was born and raised on the banks of this river. When I say that I was born and raised on the banks of Periyar, I can also say that all my life happened here in Periyar … because even from a very young age, I had strong connections with the river … I used to swim, play, take a bath, throw stones or go fishing … I mean, I used to do all these things in this river. Not just me, all the people then used to swim and take a bath in this river. I have heard my father and grandfather say that they relied on this river for drinking water … I mean the water was as clean as tears. It was so pure then. I have seen people collecting clams from the river. A person next to my home used to sell these clams dug up from the river. This river meant so much to all of us, we were so familiar with it – that all changed with the entry of these industries. And that's sad. (Maqbool, member of PMVS, personal interview, 4 June 2018)

Other members of the environmental movement also narrated stories about their emotional connections with the river and how it was more than a resource to them – something more personal, playing an integral part in their life histories. While explaining how the effects of pollution started to become more prominent in terms of fish kills or discoloration of the river water, they also illustrated how such visible effects of pollution were perceived by the people in the region.

People labelled the industrial effluents released into the river as 'company water' and issued strong directives to the community to

exercise caution while using the contaminated river. In the words of Muneer:

> So we have companies like FACT, HIL, TCC, etc. operating from here … and once in a while, dead fish floated over the river. So, when we inquired about what happened, people would tell us that 'See, there's company water in the river today, so don't swim in the river today'. Older people would give us strict directions not to play in the river today as there was 'company water' in the river. So we wouldn't dare to swim or play in the river that day. Note that this day is quite special because there are a lot of dead fish floating around in the river. People used to take these dead fish and turn them into fish curries, while some others took the dead fish and buried them around coconut trees as manure. (Muneer, member of PMVS, personal interview, 13 May 2018)

The excerpt explicates how local people perceived 'company water' as potentially dangerous and thus issued warnings to children in their community about playing in the river. Despite these warnings, the fish killed by industrial effluents were used as food by some, showing the extent to which toxins made their way through the food chain. Through a series of informal and community networks, people established a monitoring system to issue warnings about the potential danger of 'company water'; they then put a system in place to avoid exposure to the negative fallouts. This was done way before the state, or any other institution, stepped in to assess the extent of pollution. Besides these community-based monitoring and control mechanisms, local people also drew upon their everyday experiences to observe and document the river's changing nature. For example, Akbar, a local environmentalist, used the changing colour of his (originally white) bath towel (*thorthu*) to reveal the extent of pollution and discoloration of the river. In Akbar's words:

> During the 90s, especially in 1998 … apart from the fish kills, the river started flowing in different colours. The PML Company, which started operating from Edayar, changed the character of this river. So, if you ask a kid who was born during this time period … to identify the colour of the river, the answer would be red. The river started flowing red and the gradient of this red varied drastically from dark orange to black … the colours changed. This wasn't all … the fish kills became much scarier.

> The white bath towel (*thorthu*) we used for taking a bath turned yellow. That was the situation. (Akbar, member of PMVS, personal interview, 27 May 2018)

Apart from the pollution of acidic and liquid wastes, gases leaking from the industrial units posed a serious problem. Members of trade unions, as well as those involved in green movements, recollected how emissions of sulphur dioxide gas from FACT often engulfed the ambient air and created smog. Remembering the days where Eloor was swallowed in industrial smog, Gouthaman, a veteran labour organiser and ex-trade union leader, remarked:

> It would be unimaginable to drive a vehicle through Eloor without switching on the fog lamp … that is, even after the sun rises you need to have a fog lamp to drive through Eloor, even between 6 am to 10 am. The roads were all filled with smoke from the factories. This changed after the companies installed the above mechanisms. (Gouthaman, former trade union leader, 30 May 2018)

A booklet published by PMVS reconstructed an incident of gas leakage:

> The gas leak in HIL on 23 June 1979 was one of the biggest disasters that ever happened in this industrial region. A pipeline installed to transport chlorine gas from TCC to HIL burst, leaking the gas to the village. Strong winds blowing from the east and west spread the poisonous gas quickly across the region. People who inhaled the toxic gas collapsed inside factories, in their homes and by the sides of the road. People fled their homes and their *nadu* [place, domicile] just to stay alive. One person lost his life fleeing the poisons. (PMVS 2012, 35)

This was just one in a series of incidents[10] that filled the air in the Eloor region with toxic gases.[11] The line ruptured again in 1978, sending around 156 people into hospitals and exacerbating the discomfort and illness caused by inhaling poisonous gases. In June 1985 a truck carrying Hexachlorocyclopentadine (an organochlorine compound) to the HIL factory met with an accident; subsequent exposure to the toxic chemical impaired the vision of more than 250 individuals. Talking about the frequent gas leaks from industries, Ramachandran, a well-known trade union leader who worked in a public sector enterprise, commented that,

> During the initial days there were issues with SO_2 in air … children had issues soon after being exposed to the SO_2 spread in the atmosphere because the PCB at that time was not very vigilant about the operation of industries or release of pollutants.[12]

The memories of people in the region are thus laden with unpleasant incidents as they tried to reconstruct their struggles with pollution.

Though pollution-related issues have become the new normal for the residents of the Eloor-Edayar industrial region, things grew more intense after an incident in which a local stream was set on fire. In 1990 the Kuzhikkandam stream caught fire when toluene, a highly flammable chemical, leaked into its waters from HIL. The burning river caused many health issues for people living by its banks; houses also caught alight and burned down. This incident sparked a wave of anger and dissent. Local people gathered in a village upper-primary school and formed an 'action council' to protest against pollution.

This marked the beginning of an organised struggle against industrial pollution (Booklet: 'To the People who Ensure the Death of the River Periyar, the lifeline of South Kerala', 36). Interviews with local environmentalists and frontline leaders of PMVS portrayed a more intense and elaborate picture of the region as it confronts the fallout from industrial pollution. The members of the green movements often recollected memories of navigating the negative effects of pollution, associating these instances with subsequent episodes of organised collective action against those responsible. Nevertheless, the history of resistance to pollution can be traced back well beyond the formation of an action council. It started as early as 1972, marking the beginning of an era of grassroots movements. The following section offers a brief history and timeline of the Anti-Pollution Committee in the Eloor-Edayar region and elaborates on the conditions that led to the emergence of organised collective action.

A brief history of the local environmental movement

'Welcome to the Gas Chamber in Eloor' read the placard held by Mr K. M. Kunhappan,[13] a former Naxalite, as he stood at the entrance of Kalamassery bridge protesting against the menace of industrial pollution. Recollecting the memories surrounding his one-man protest in the 1970s, Kunhappan described the context in which such an act took place:

> During my childhood, the river used to overflow. The flow would be so strong that sometimes it was impossible to steer canoes. The water was as clear as glass. The rivulets and streams were plentiful. [It's all gone now]. Fish were abundant during the 1950s … My mother would keep rice on the firewood stove … there's a prawn basket … with that basket she would then go to the river to catch fish and prawns. She would come back in no time. By the time she cleaned and cooked the fish and prawns into a curry, the rice would be cooked. Many varieties of fish, prawns and shrimp used to live under the mosses layering the surface of the river. But today many varieties of fish that were once available in plenty, such as Kolan, Kanambu, Poolan, have all disappeared. After 1975 the river started to change bit by bit, and much of that change was related to the growing number of factories in the region. The industries have turned this river into its sewer … by the 1980s, the river was almost entirely polluted. The factories had no pipelines and they released all the effluents into the river. We had to use that dirty water for cooking rice porridge (food) … and there were fish kills. And whenever fish kills happened, people would gather all the dead fish floating on top of the river, and then they would cook and eat it. They didn't recognise the dead fish as poison. That was the situation.
>
> I first reacted in 1971 … after the floods. The area was inundated, and the smoke from the FACT would cover the region. Thick smoke engulfed the region, so much that even buses had to stop and wait until the smoke subsided. I soon realised that this was a dangerous situation … a situation that threatens the entire population living in this area … and I realized that the precarity of the situation was such that there was no choice but to react. So I went to Ernakulam and wrote a board that read 'Welcome to the Gas Chamber in Eloor' and then kept that board/placard near the Kalamassery bridge. ('The News Minute', 15 July 2017)

In this excerpt, taken from a video interview with 'The News Minute' (an online English-language news portal), Kunhappan *chettan* vividly narrates the transformation of the river under the regime of industrial capitalism and reveals how that influenced him to take action.[14] It portrays how the river changed over the years, from a period in which fish was available in plenty, to the extent that his mother could catch them with a basket right before a meal, to one in which dead fish float on the surface of the river. The narratives highlight how the act of protest

is intertwined with everyday lives and experiences, as Kunhappan *chettan* carefully explains how pollution disrupted everyday norms for people in the region. Having realised the connection between the local environmental grievances and industrial pollution, Kunhappan *chettan* decided to call out the danger in the form of a placard. Upon this characterised the region as a 'gas chamber' filled with toxic fumes from industry.[15] The video interview also highlights how his act of protest was powerfully influenced by his daily experiences of navigating pollution, and of seeing how its effects tormented people in his village (Auyero 2004).

What started as a one-person protest soon galvanised into a broader movement that put together a sturdy fight against the polluting industries – a fight that spans almost half a century. During an interview I conducted with Kumar, the frontline leader and Research Coordinator of Periyar Malineekarana Virudha Samithi (PMVS hereafter, Periyar Anti-Pollution Committee), he reflected on the history of the local environmental movement and his role in establishing an organised form of collective action through the setting up of the PMVS:

> PMVS (Periya Malineekarana Virudha Samithi) as an organisation has been in the movement field for the last 20 years or so, but our protests in Eloor have a longer history than that … [after Kunhappan *chettan*'s protest in 1972] the protests re-emerged in 1990, and that's when I became part of the movement/protests. But then PMVS hasn't come into operation; we protested under a *Janakeeya Action Council* (People's Action Council). The Action Council was formed in 1990 following an incident in Kuzhikkandam Thodu ['canal'] when the waters of the canal caught fire. This burning canal caused severe damage to the homes on the banks and suffocation in people who inhaled the toxic air coming from the burned chemicals. The people's intervention in the 1990s was organised to protest this incident, which subsided after 1 or 2 years.
>
> The protests re-emerged in 1997 when a new private company called Mercum started the trial run. During the trial run, hydrogen sulphide gas leaked into the atmosphere, and people started experiencing breathing problems, asthmatic attacks and health discomforts; many people were hospitalised. The toxic gas stayed in the atmosphere for hours and caused severe health troubles for the people staying in the region. This event led to fresh

> protests in the region, which remained active for about 4 to 5 years. Around the same time in June (11 June 1998) a fish kill happened in Eloor. Though many such events like the discoloration of the River Periyar or fish kills were happening in the backdrop, this particular incident of a fish kill that happened during the monsoons (*varshakalam*) was the largest in the history of Periyar. Around 5 crores worth of fishes were killed in the river for over a stretch of 12 km. The intervention took the form of a massive protest following this incident. We organised a convention in Varapuzha, bringing together fish workers, local workers, elected representatives of local self-government institutions and other local people. This meeting was attended by many eminent environmentalists such as Dr M. K. Prasad. PMVS was announced during this meeting on 15 June 1998. The meeting decided to intensify protest activities. (Kumar, founding member and Research Coordinator of PMVS, 26 May 2018)

As detailed in the excerpt above, PMVS was constituted on 15 June 1998, with the aim of strengthening the fight against industrial pollution in the region. The convention described above also stood out in terms of mass participation. People from across the region attended this event, which had been organised to brainstorm about the ways in which people can address the issue of pollution. Recalling the large numbers of participants, Ibrahim described the event as follows:

> This convention was attended by a lot of people who relied on the fishing sector for their subsistence, not just those workers, but the Convention was attended by political parties … because the people then had realised … that this cannot be left unchallenged. Then Eloor was a Panchayath … Alangad was a Block[16] (Panchayath) … the president from there attended … Varappuzha panchayath, Eloor panchayath, Kadamakkudi panchayath … many Panchayath Presidents and Panchayath members attended and participated in this Convention. So this ended up being a massive Convention that saw participation from across many sections of people. And it's there we decided to form and name our organisation. I mean this is a group, right? So we would need a name moving forward. So then Kumar suggested the name 'Periyar Malineekarana Virudha Samithi' (Periyar Anti-Pollution Campaign). That's how this name came into being. (Ibrahim, founding member of PMVS, personal interview, 27 May 2019)

The excerpt clearly shows how the anti-pollution campaign in the region started as a movement with mass participation. The volume of participants is also notable considering how participation dwindled in the later periods of mobilisation. Pollution was established as a shared grievance among the people; everyone believed that collective action could resolve the issues they were facing. In other words, the participants, including elected representatives, felt the need to organise action against pollution. This is significant considering the recent decline of the environmental movement, along with targeted attacks from local politicians and elected representatives. Furthermore, it highlights how the initial organisation of the movement fostered an atmosphere of political opportunity, in which they largely received the support of local politicians, including the unions.

Once again this is interesting considering how such as atmosphere of opportunity later transformed into a political threat. In other words, close analysis of the trajectory of the local environmental movement indicates how a 'hybrid-model' (Almeida 2019) characterised by a combination of threats and opportunities helps to explain more clearly the political and economic atmosphere confronted by the local environmental movement. The targeted attacks on green activists from the state-industry nexus illustrates how political support disappears when the movement challenges the status quo or attacks the centres of power and development.[17]

During the convention, the founding members of PMVS also decided to organise a human chain to protest against the adverse health and environmental effects of industrial toxins. This human chain, organised on 1 August 1998, played a crucial role in making the fight against pollution more visible and resonant among mainstream society in the state. Kumar started talking about the organisation of a human chain with a lot of enthusiasm and pride because this protest event was huge. It still occupies a unique position in the history of protest politics in Kerala.

The massive human chain formed across the river was created with the help of fish workers, who brought their fishing boats to form the protest platform. A series of fishing boats was parked across the river, enabling people to form human chains by holding their hands in solidarity. The act of protest became symbolic when people held their hands across the river, as if seeking to protect it from the fallouts of pollution. From this protest on, the River Periyar has always played a central role in the mobilising practices and tactics of the local environmental movement, ranging from occupying the centre of environmental grievances to being the field of protest.

Periodisation

Drawing from the protest events and incidents detailed above, it is possible to construct a timeline analysing the trajectory of the local environmental movement, marking its origin, growth and decline.

The periodisation divides the environmental movement against industrial pollution into four distinct phases. The initial phase, lasting from 1972 until 1998, is marked by the emergence of grassroots resistance against the environmental grievances created by industrial pollution. The series of protest events and incidents from 1972 to 1998 culminated in the formation of the PMVS, marking the beginning of an organised grassroots environmental movement against the issue of pollution. The region witnessed many protest events, demonstrations and campaigns condemning the ill-effects of pollution throughout the period from 1998 until 2004. The region saw intense activity by the movement from 1998. These acts of protests and sustained campaigns aided in bringing more visibility and public support to the Anti-Pollution Campaign in the region. They also played an instrumental role in bringing the issue of pollution in the Eloor-Edayar belt to the consideration of the Supreme Court Monitoring Committee (SCMC).

The second phase, ranging from 2004 to 2009, witnessed the growth of the environmental movement, in which the movement actors achieved successful interventions to ameliorate pollution. The intervention of the SCMC and the subsequent constitution of the Local Area Environment Committee (LAEC) marked a new phase in the struggle against pollution, with the initiation of institutional and legal interventions against polluting industries (Shrivastava 2007). Using powers vested by the Supreme Court, the LAEC[18] conducted environmental compliance audits in more than 100 industries in the region. The LAEC was granted the power to act against polluting industries caught with grave violations of the environmental guidelines and regulations (LAEC 2006). Following this, the LAEC issued closure notices to companies violating environmental guidelines.

The operations of LAEC led to significant improvements in the local atmosphere as companies started taking pollution control mechanisms more seriously. However, the heightened power of the LAEC members that enabled them to issue closure notices[19] to more than 30 industries irked many local trade union leaders, who started to mobilise resistance to the operations of the committee, filing complaints with the state government. The swift operations of the LAEC in alleviating local environmental issues were thwarted when the state government ordered the

committee to be reconstituted, with the inclusion of trade union leaders in 2010 (Shrivastava 2007, personal interviews 2018). The changes in the structure and composition of the LAEC soon diluted and curtailed its scope of operations.

The entry of trade union leaders into the LAEC also marked the beginning of the decline of the local environmental movement, pushing the movement into a period of quiescence (Earl 2013). Subsequent years witnessed the revamping of the union collective, SCTU, which saw the SCTU launch a well-organised counter-campaign against the local environmental movement, discrediting the frontline leaders. A detailed analysis of the counterframes as provided in Chapter 6, which examines the frame-disputes between the trade union and the green movement. This period also transformed the fight against pollution into a 'jobs vs. the environment' trade-off. SCTU attempted to discredit and delegitimise the local environmental movement by framing the frontline leaders as 'anti-national', 'extremist' and 'foreign funded' (SCTU 2013; Sunil 2016). These malicious campaigns, combined with surveillance from the state, adversely affected the mass support base of the movement, pushing the green movement into a phase of quiescence. The revamping of SCTU played a crucial role in causing the temporary decline of the local environmental movement at a time when the movement landscape was filled with claims attacking local environmental activists' characters and motives.

However, the emergence of new environmental groups such as Janajagratha (People Vigilante) in response to constant attacks against local environmentalists marks the beginning of a period of re-emergence, during which the local environmental movement has intensified the fight against pollution. Though many of these legal fights have been ongoing for several decades, favourable orders from the court make them significant in reaffirming the green movement's relevance. The intensification of legal battles and a higher rate of success in litigations (NGT 2018) against polluting industries distinguish this phase from others, marking the revival of the green movement. According to the environmentalists, the use of a multi-pronged strategy that combines both direct action methods and legal challenges has brought them back into the movement field. Detailed analyses of the phases serves to uncover many important aspects surrounding the emergence of the green movement. The following section reveals how extant theories explain the emergence and growth of the local environmental movement.

What led to the emergence of the local environmental movement?

A few factors played an important role in facilitating the emergence and growth of the local environmental movements. These included the presence of shared environmental grievances, the prior organisational experience of the frontline leaders, the presence of a wide base of support and the use of creative protest tactics. Interestingly, it appears that the strength of grievances played as significant a role as prior organisational experience and political opportunities/threats, at least as far as the conditions of emergence are concerned.

The operation of grievances in the context of this movement highlights the importance of subjective and emotional interpretations of grievances aside from the disruption of daily life (Snow et al. 1998). The grievances also elicited emotional responses from people as they started to live with fear and anxiety about the effects of exposure to pollution and to lament over the loss of the River Periyar to pollution. The interpretation of environmental grievances by making them relevant to everyday lives, emotions and wellbeing enabled the local activists to motivate collective action (Auyero 2004).

Elucidating the strategies adopted to raise awareness about the environmental grievances, Kumar observed:

> There were only a few of us. Actually, we did not have to tell much because people were experiencing it already. The river is polluted … there is pollution in the air … there are cancer patients.

Day-to-day exposure to the fallouts of pollution, amplified by visible effects such as smog or the polluted river, eased the process of raising awareness about the issue among local people. In other words, by reiterating the importance of grievances in disrupting everyday lives leading to organised resistance, the discussions establish the continued relevance of grievances in explaining movement emergence.

More so, being a resource-poor movement organised by an environmentally excluded social group, the exemplar of PMVS also challenges the conceptions of resource-mobilisation theory (RMT hereafter) (McCarthy and Zald 1977; 2001). Despite being poor in terms of resources, the PMVS uses 'negative inducements' (Buechler 2011, 133) such as strikes, protests and other disruptive tactics to garner the attention of the target and the larger audience. In doing so, the exemplar of PMVS leans

more towards the model of Piven and Cloward (1991) and reaffirms how RMT downplayed the role of the mass-base of social movements (McAdam 1982).

Prior organisational experience also played a prominent role in helping local environmental activists to form the PMVS and lead the green movement with a sustained series of collective action events. Working with progressive organisations such as the Kerala Sasthra Sahithya Parishad (KSSP hereafter, The People's Science Movement) helped the leaders to strategise and plan action against the polluting industries. The response of KSSP to local pollution also helped the frontline leaders to establish informal and personal networks across the region (Literacy Mission campaign etc.), so much so that people recognised them by the name of this organisation. In discussing response of KSSP to pollution, Ibrahim detailed how the organisation was oblivious when they raised issues of pollution within the group; however, they encouraged the greens to gather more information and to organise some form of collective action. In reference to their association with KSSP, Ibrahim explained how people referred to them as 'Parishad people' because of their active participation. Elaborating on their experience working with KSSP, Ibrahim remarked that:

> We were branded as 'Parishad people' then; even today there are people who recognise us as the guys who were active in Parishad. We were pretty active in the social front then, especially in connection to the Literacy Mission. It was through the activities of Literacy Mission that we became more connected to the activities of KSSP (Kerala Sasthra Sahithya Parishad, The People's Science Movement). It was during our association with Parishad that we realised the issues with our river. Our joining the Parishad played a huge role in developing this realisation. However, Parishad did not do anything about this, but instead told us that 'you people must study more about this issue and submit a report. Once you study, we will consider further action'. (Ibrahim, founding member of PMVS, personal interview, 20 July 2018)

More importantly, the interviews underscore the cognitive liberation (McAdam 1982) attained by the green activists, where they articulate the importance of organised action to fight pollution and reaffirm it as the only way out. They establish the importance of action throughout the interviews when they describe the conditions of pollutions and how that

convinced them 'to do something'. Most of the interviews with the local environmentalists involved an incident of pollution that convinced the actor to take up action. This incident sometimes varied across narratives based on the location of the activists in the Eloor-Edayar industrial belt. In addition, the emergence of the local movement fits McAdam's political process model (1982) in many respects: in terms of the presence of a conducive political atmosphere, subjective and emotional interpretation of shared grievances, indigenous organisation strength and cognitive liberation. However, the later phases of the movement shift away from this model in terms of the variability of the political and economic atmosphere. While talking about the withdrawal of unions and mainstream political parties from the Anti-Pollution Campaign, for example, Muneer observed:

> You must also remember that all these people were cooperative during the initial days … the Panchayats and trade unions were supportive of that protest. Representatives from the Village and Block Panchayaths, members of CPIM and Congress Party, all these people co-operated, you know. They sold themselves out after this protest. They were all part of this movement; then they had all realised how the local industries had wreaked havoc in the region. (Muneer, member of PMVS, personal interview, 13 May 2018)

As explicated in the excerpt and discussed in the sections above, what prevailed as an opportunity for building alliances soon transformed into a threat. In other words, the qualitative evidence provided in this chapter reaffirms that a model of hybrid political environment (Almeida 2019; Meyer 2004) would be useful in explaining the political and economic conditions faced by the local environmental movement. Furthermore, explorations into the motivations for collective action, as embellished in the excerpts provided here, would indicate how the formation of the local green movement is rooted in a collective logic as opposed to utilitarian self-interest. Participation was often rooted in feelings of solidarity and shared interests with other people as they fought against pollution.

The revival of the Standing Council

It is equally important to trace the origin of the local trade union movement and to identify the context in which an open conflict between the union and the green movement developed. The emergence and

expansion of chemical factories along the banks of the river also witnessed the growth of factory workers' trade unions.[20] Soon after the formation of trade unions affiliated to mainstream political parties, the union leaders brainstormed about creating a collective of unions in 1991 in response to an issue that emerged when FACT installed a Caprolactam plant in the region.[21] The export-oriented plant that was installed after incurring huge financial liability had to face a major set-back when the Indian government reduced the import duty of Caprolactam. Trade unions launched demonstrations against this move to reduce import duty by the first UPA (United Progressive Alliance) government, claiming that it had given in to the 'pressure from foreign countries and international agencies such as IMF and World Bank to adopt a concept of "zero duty"'. It was during these joint protests that the trade unions started discussing the possibility of developing a single platform, perhaps better described as a 'common platform'. This later translated into the formation of the Standing Council of Trade Unions (SCTU). In explaining the context, Padmanabhan gave more details concerning its origin:

> So Caprolactam issue was the first incident where the Standing Council intervened as a forum. We did not dismiss the forum afterwards because more issues started affecting the industries … crises started creeping into the industrial sector, one after the other. The hike in electricity charges affected the industries … especially because of the cross-subsidy factor. It adversely affected the industries.

Although low electricity charges had been an encouraging factor for initial investment, it later proved to be an issue of concern for the majority of industries in the region. To reduce the rates for the public, the Electricity Board frequently resolved to levy higher charges from the industries. This rendered the financial situation of many power-intensive industries less stable, to a point where some of them had to close. During the interviews, trade union leaders recollected how the financial crisis caused by higher electricity rates had led to the temporary closure of Binani industries, Travancore Chemical Company and a smelter owned by HINDALCO. Countering the popular argument prevalent against power-intensive industries, James, a well-known trade union leader, illustrated the importance of industries who are bulk consumers as follows:

> A group of people in Kerala are discussing the need to eliminate these power-thirsty industries from the state. They are of the view

> that we need to chase away these power-hungry industries. I mean, that will shut the Electricity Board down because power grid is strengthened, and its capacity is enhanced by bulk consumers. We cannot operate this by just providing electricity to the villages. People who don't understand these details say that they don't want these industries. We need both this and that, you know. So, many of these industries were closing … and the Standing Council has organized so many protests … both now and in the past.

It was also an interesting coincidence that the Standing Council, after lying dormant for a couple of years, came back to life when industries were ordered to close by the Local Area Environmental Committee (LAEC, discussed above), for reasons of non-compliance with environmental regulations. In other words, the Standing Council became active again when the local environmental movement started to accomplish some success, in terms of implementing pollution regulation mechanisms along the banks of the River Periyar. Reflecting on the specific instance where the tensions between SCTU and PMVS intensified, Madhu, a trade union leader, explained:

> When they decided to close down 249 industries all of a sudden (citing pollution) … that was a shock to us … It came as a shock to the industrial sector as a whole, for that matter. There are industries that operate … those that are honest … and there also are some thieves … There are many varieties, but to close them all down is not a solution. So many people will lose their jobs if these are closed down. So that's how we started fighting against PMVS. You understand? Such was the situation.

As the excerpt indicates, the issuing of closure notices by LAEC to industries that were non-compliant proved to be a watershed moment in the history of labour-environmental conflicts in the region. The decision provoked stringent campaigns from the Standing Council against the environmental movement. From the standpoint of the local environmental movement, its minor success in assuming a position of power and implementing policy changes in fact played an instrumental role both in creating a countermovement and in emboldening their counterframing strategies. This is discussed in more detail in Chapter 7, which also unpacks the implications of these counter-campaigns for the plight of local environmental action.

Conclusion

In this chapter I have traced the history of local industrial development in the Eloor-Edayar industrial belt. Relying on oral histories and documents, this chapter drew upon narratives to reconstruct the effects of industrial pollution on the local people and ecology. The excerpts explicated how environmental grievances caused disruption to the everyday lives of local people, igniting grassroots resistance against pollution as a result. Most importantly, this chapter traced the trajectory and created a periodisation of the local environmental movement. The four phases that it has identified explain how the trajectory of the local environmental movement was not linear; its initial phase of growth and development was followed by a period of quiescence after a few years. However, the periodisation underscored how the green movement is reviving collective action in the present, with the emergence of new environmental groups and more intense legal battles.

Most significantly of all, this chapter examined the factors that could explain the emergence and spread of the local environmental movement, discovering that grievances, political opportunities, prior organisational experiences and networks played equal roles. By focusing on grievances, the data presented in this chapter reiterates their continued relevance in understanding the emergence of environmental movements. In addition, as a resource poor-movement with a wide social base of support, the green movement challenges the traditional theories of resource mobilisation. Moving away from the old political opportunity model, the shifting political-economic conditions faced by the green movement, featuring both opportunities and constraints, established the need for a hybrid model of the political environment (Almeida 2019). This chapter also briefly introduced the formation of the union collective, the Standing Council of Trade Unions, and explored how that was revamped to counter the actions of the local environmental movement.

In sum, this chapter sets the background for understanding labour-environmental conflicts by tracing the emergence of polarised interests between trade unions and green movements over the years. It underscores how the political economy of development and industrial capitalism has played a prominent role in shaping the origin and trajectory of the local environmental movement. Building on the findings presented in this chapter, the next chapter explores how industrial capitalism influences the mobilising processes of the two movements, PMVS and SCTU, and goes on to explain how access to resources plays out in the movement field.

Notes

1 The industrial policy regimes of Travancore can be divided into two phases. The first phase spans 1914 to 1930, when policies were aimed at revamping small-scale and cottage industries that relied on local capital and resources. The second phase begins in the late 1930s, when the state started supporting the development of modern industrial units (Thomas 2005,11; Rammohan 1996; Bright Singh 1944 as cited in Thomas 2005). This change in policies has been attributed to the Dewan of Travancore, Sir C. P. Ramaswamy Aiyer, as well as to mounting pressure from the public in favour of large industries.

2 A designated (powerful) government official who held revenue collecting power, vested by the British East India Company.

3 The princely state invited energy-intensive industries to the region by offering them crucial inputs such as electricity for a reduced price. The surplus availability of electricity generated from the Pallivasal hydroelectric power project kept the price as low as nine paise per unit for the industries. The reduced rates for electricity during the initial phase were crucial for many of these power-intensive industries; the subsequent hike in energy prices later in their history often created friction between the industries and the State Electricity Board. In fact, it was the offer of cheap electricity that led industries to overlook the unsuitability of the region in other respects and establish their operations in Kerala. Jayan Thomas uses the example of IAC's smelter in Alwaye (also known as Aluva) to establish this point further. In order to reap the benefits offered by cheap hydroelectric power, IAC chose Aluva over Calcutta, where Bauxite reserves were available in plenty, to set up its smelter unit. In his words:

> In the late 1930s bauxite reserves were abundant in India's eastern region, and the major aluminium-consuming industries, utensil-making plants for example, were located in Calcutta (now Kolkata) [in India's eastern region]. It was only natural then for IAC to locate its plant converting bauxite to alumina in Muri in eastern India and its rolling mill in Calcutta. However, the smelter plant, whose operations require large quantities of electricity, was located in Alwaye in Kerala – disregarding the high costs involved in transporting alumina from Muri to Alwaye, and then transporting aluminium ingots back to Calcutta – in order to make use of the cheap hydroelectric power from the Pallivasal project. (Thomas 2005, 12–13)

4 For more details on FACT's organisational history, structure and major products, see: https://www.fert.nic.in/psu/fertilizers-and-chemicals-travancore-limited-fact.

5 River Periyar, a perennial river, is the longest river in the state with a length of 244 kilometres (151.6 miles) (Government of Kerala 2020). Popularly known as 'The Lifeline of Kerala', the river provides drinking water to many towns and serves major dams and hydroelectric projects.

6 The reference to the direction of flow in the excerpt is particularly important; it is strategically included in the narrative to reaffirm the union's position of a denial of pollution. According to the unions, industrial effluents will never reach the stations that pump out drinking water for the river flows only in one direction: east to west. This is discussed in greater detail in Chapter 6, which explores the disputed frames surrounding pollution.

7 An extensive discussion of the contested claims surrounding pollution is provided in Chapter 6. However, the narratives presented here illustrate how the collective action frames of the unions transformed over the years. It expounds on how the polarised frames evolved over the years, from a point in history where both the movements (unions and greens) collectively accepted and protested against pollution.

8 Continued exposure to pollution has also caused health impacts among people. A survey conducted in 2008 by the state government among 327 households living around Kuzhikandam *thodu* found that more than 322 households reported having individuals with health issues related to pollution. The average incidence of many ailments, including asthma, heath diseases, reproductive issues, kidney-related issues, nervous disorders and cancer, was much higher among Eloor residents in comparison with those of Pindimana village, which served as the control group (PMVS 2012).

9 During the interviews, green activists clearly laid out how the release of untreated industrial effluents adversely affected the flow and made the river more acidic over the years, during which the PH levels went up from 2.5 to 4.5. A study conducted by the Supreme Court

Monitoring Committee (SCMC hereafter) identified many dangerous metals including lead, cadmium, chromium, zinc, magnesium, nickel, copper, iron and fluoride in the stretch of River Periyar that runs from Chittoor to Eloor.

10 Many of these instances were carefully documented in the newsletters published by the PMVS. This had been done while paying close attention to the details, including the names of the chemicals, the nature of the chemical compound, the kind of harm inflicted on the local people and the number of people adversely affected. Such narratives reveal the philosophy of activism adopted by the green movement, which Kumar describes as a combination of 'study and activism'. This also distinguishes the green movement from the trade union movement, with the former making claims based on scientific evidence and following a very rigorous model of fact-keeping and documentation. Despite being a resource-poor movement with very little infrastructure to operate or collect information, it is impressive to see the rigorous documentation, organisational strategies and fact-based activism adopted by PMVS, which have garnered it both visibility and legitimacy.

11 Similar gas leaks were reported in 1969 and 1974.

12 Personal interview with Ramachandran on 3 July 2018.

13 Kunhappan *chettan* later served as a municipal councillor and the Convener of *Periyar Malineekaran Virudha Samithi* (PMVS).

14 I conducted an interview with Kunhappan on 5 June 2018. However, poor health and fading memory got in the way of completing the interview with a guide; it ended up being more like a conversation where I listened to whatever Kunhappan *chettan* wanted to tell me. His failing health and fading memory embodied all the struggles his body and mind had gone through while fighting against injustices for all these years. This video interview was documented at a point when he could still recollect his one-person protest, hence I have used it here with proper acknowledgement. Kunhappan *chettan* passed away in 2023, making this footage more important as a memorial to his life and activism.

15 It is interesting to note how little has changed. There was a déjà vu moment in 2022, when the High Court of Kerala used the term 'gas chamber' while commenting on atmospheric pollution following the fire at Brahmapuram waste plant and the sad state of solid waste management under the Greater Cochin Municipal Corporation. https://indianexpress.com/article/cities/thiruvananthapuram/kochi-a-gas-chamber-brahmapuram-waste-plant-fire-kerala-hc-8484545/.

16 Block Panchayath is one of the tiers in the three tier Panchayati Raj system in India. For more details see the Kerala Panchayati Raj Act. https://dop.lsgkerala.gov.in/ml/system/files/article/Kerala%20Panchayati%20Raj%20Act%201994%20and%20Rules.pdf.

17 The periodisation of the movement indicates how the successful outcomes accomplished by the green movement through the LAEC directly challenged the domination of industrial capitalism, often causing loss of profits. This played a crucial role in unleashing the counterattack on the greens and helped the industries to gather the support of unions.

18 The LAEC had members from industrial organisations, the local environmental movement and civil society. Kumar, the frontline leader of PMVS, was one of the members of this committee (LAEC 2006). Representation at the LAEC offered the local environmentalists a platform to raise their grievances effectively and partake in the process of proposing solutions that can alleviate the issue of pollution. In this regard, participation in the LAEC provided access to institutional power for the local environmentalists. This they used to take constructive actions to ameliorate and regulate the release of untreated industrial waste into the local ecology.

19 More details about the industries against which the LAEC recommended action can found in the Environmental Audit Report (LAEC 2006).

20 See *The History of Trade Union Movement in Kerala* by K. Ramachandran Nair (2006) for a comprehensive overview of the emergence and growth of organised labour movement in the state.

21 Interview with union leader Padmanabhan, conducted on 18 May 2018.

4
Political economy of industrial capitalism, unions and environmental movements

> I would say that trade unions or the working class in general have lost their bargaining power … This explains how capitalism … or capital … has been successful in rendering the worker powerless. The union leadership has heavily aided this process, I would say … In fact, they have established a friendly relationship with capitalism, a friendship often named as crony capitalism … yes, crony capitalism is a reality … It has spread to almost all facets of life including the spaces and processes of collective resistance. (Kumar, frontline leader and Research Co-ordinator of PMVS)

During a period when much of the dominant literature, popularly dubbed as 'social movement studies', ignores the linkage between capitalism and social movements (Hetland and Goodwin 2013; Barker et al. 2013), Kumar, the frontline leader of PMVS, poignantly articulates the specific modalities through which capitalism derails social struggles. Befriending trade unions and the state, neoliberal capitalism effectively controls dissenting voices by making inroads into the landscape of collective action. This nexus, monikered popularly as cronyism,[1] is not new. It has long been part of Indian capitalism, during both the pre- and post-independence eras, and liberalisation has done little to eliminate it (Mazumdar 2008). Exposing the presence and manifestations of this nexus in the movement field, the passage above challenges extant understandings and demonstrates how political-economic factors actively shape the mobilising processes and outcomes.

To put it differently, in this chapter I chart how capitalism breaks out of the definitions[2] that confine it to the realms of production to step instead into the arena of movement, mobilising as a strategy to counter

campaigns against industrial pollution. The influence of capitalism on everyday life is nothing new; it has been well articulated in the works of neo-Marxist and post-Marxist scholars through to those of ecological Marxists (Horkheimer [1931] 1993; Adorno and Horkheimer 1972; Cohen 1982; Lefebvre 1984; Mouffe 1995; Laclau and Mouffe 1998; Brand and Wissen 2021). However, the microprocesses through which capitalism manoeuvres the repertoires of contention to advance its project of profit maximisation stand less explored, especially in the context of countries in the Global South. Ironic as it may sound, the entry of capitalist forces into the field of social movements poses serious threats to resource-poor social struggles, as these skew the movement field in terms of financial resources. Thus capital, aside from its role as a factor of production that sustains the drive for accumulation, also assumes a new responsibility: the funding of movements that curb dissenting voices in favour of accumulation. More research, both theoretical and empirical, is thus required to unpack the various modalities deployed by 'capital' in order to derail anti-capitalist social movements.

Moreover, this chapter explores how PMVS, the local environmental movement, identifies and interprets the modes through which capitalism has operated in the movement landscape. What becomes apparent is the dominion of capitalism in Kerala's movement landscape; this becomes significant in considering the positioning of the state as a communist haven that facilitates working-class mobilisation, democratic decentralisation and public action. Furthermore, the discussion expands the debates on the transformation of institutionalised trade unions and their role in oiling the wheels of cronyism in Kerala by anchoring the relations between the state and private capitalists.

Such an alliance between unions and private capitalists creates unique impediments on the path towards arresting environmental pollution and resultant inequality. In addition, my intent here is to understand the ways in which resource-poor movements identify and tackle crony capitalism, and in so doing to facilitate a critical exploration of resource-mobilisation theory (RMT hereafter) from the standpoint of distributional/structural inequality in society.

Omission of capitalism from movement studies?

Extant critiques of the mainstream social movement theories have highlighted the neglect of political economy perspectives, particularly Marxian theories, while studying varied aspects of movements

(Nilsen 2008; Della Porta 2015, 2017; Barker et al. 2013; Hetland and Goodwin 2013). In calling out the strange disappearance of the term capitalism from the mainstream literature on movements, Hetland and Goodwin (2013, 83) observe that:

> While capitalism has spread to nearly every corner of the globe, scholars who specialize in the study of social movements, especially in the United States, have increasingly ignored the ways in which capitalism shapes social movements.

Della Porta (2017) identifies similar problems with the 'old toolkit' developed within mainstream social movement theories for comprehensively analysing the anti-austerity protests that emerged in the wake of the global financial crisis of 2008. Examining the social base of the anti-austerity movements, Della Porta (2015; 2017) re-emphasises the need for considering socio-economic conditions while studying protests. To explain the class-based nature of anti-austerity protests, Donatella Della Porta (2017, 456) relies on Marxist and post-Marxist approaches to capitalist transformations. Furthermore, aiming to fill the void, scholars have proposed a Marxist theory of social movements (Nilsen 2008. 2009; Nilsen and Cox 2013), though this has not been taken up extensively. Therefore, building on this critique, the arguments and data presented in this chapter demonstrate the benefits of combining political economy and social constructionist approaches to understanding social movement processes and outcomes.

Given the profound impacts of capitalist institutions on society and social formations, the failure to consider capitalist system adversely affects movement analysis. In *Marxism and Social Movements*, Barker et al. (2013) identify a distinct lack of activist and scholarly work that deals with developing a Marxist theory of social movements. They go on to describe how the limited interactions that have been discussed can be described best as 'caricatures or straw-man versions' of Marxist theory. In addition to problematising the absence of capitalism and Marxian political economy, many of these critiques point out how this omission pre-empts movement theories from understanding the influence of structural and political-economic factors on movements; a sense of the bigger picture is consequently lost (Barker et al. 2013; Hetland and Goodwin 2013; Della Porta 2015). Significantly the avoidance of systemic aspects, according to these authors, has resulted in producing studies that overlook 'people's potential to make their own history' (Barker et al. 2013, 7).

In a way, many of these critiques expose how the dominant theories completely ignore the effects of the world capitalist system in creating, sustaining or repressing many of the movements or collective action events across the world. More importantly, such exclusions are problematic, if not outrageous, considering the multitude of ways in which global capitalist economic systems (Barker 2013; Barker et al. 2013), logics of accumulation (Motta and Nilsen 2011), neoliberal globalisation (Cox and Nilsen 2007; Benski et al. 2013; Della Porta 2015) and colonial and neocolonial forms of domination (Friedmann 2005; Nilsen 2008; Motta and Nilsen 2011; Singh 2013) engender social, economic and environmental grievances for people across the world. Drawing attention to this lack of engagement with 'the system' within movement analysis, Barker et al. observe that:

> there is … 'a system' against which so many of today's protests are pitched, even if they are not articulated solely, or event at all, in the language of 'class'. Yet there seems to be little recognition of this in contemporary literature on social movements. (Barker et al. 2013, 2)

Reading this critique alongside the postcolonial re-reading of sociological theory,[3] one can easily perceive how this lack of focus on 'system' within movement theories can be understood as part of the dominant trend in sociological theories that often preclude inquiries into the ways in which the structure or the 'system' produces social inequalities (Bhambra 2016). It should also be noted that when 'mainstream movement studies' were reluctant to figure in structural factors, scholarship from postcolonial societies such as India meticulously studied what is referred often as 'new social movements'. Such scholarship has long integrated the role of social, economic and cultural systems of oppression in producing collective grievances (Omvedt 1993; Oommen 1990, 2011). Capitalism was explicitly mentioned in these analyses of social movements 'from below', including the agrarian mobilisations, identity struggles and environmental movements (Oommen 1984; Omvedt 1994; Kothari 2005).[4] Lauding such interventions, Sklair (1997) observes how such studies reaffirm the potential of localised struggles against the excesses of neoliberal capitalism.

In short, the critiques of dominant theories of social movements underscore the lack of focus on political-economic factors in the study of movements and explain how such omissions affect movement analysis. In the context of these emerging studies, which point out the disappearance of capitalism and discussion of structural and socio-economic

factors within movement theories, this chapter seeks to understand the myriad ways in which capitalism influences social movement mobilisation and inter-movement relationships in Kerala. More importantly, though the extant critiques eloquently reveal the absence of capitalism and neglect of Marxian theoretical perspectives, there is not enough discussion on the need for inquiries that simultaneously consider the structure and the individual. In other words, there is a dearth of studies and literature that request engagement with multiple levels of analysis in order to understand the effects of structural and political-economic factors on the micromobilisation processes, and on movement decisions at the level of the individual movement actor.

The remainder of this chapter is an attempt to understand the effects of political economy on movements through individual movement framings. The evidence presented here argues how understanding the effects of capitalism using the individual movement frames can expand the scholarship on ideologies and movement framings (Oliver and Johnston 2000; Johnston and Oliver 2005; Snow and Benford 2005) – or rather the ways in which dominant ideologies and frames intrude on the movement frames and fields of progressive grassroots movements.

Therefore, departing from the popular tendency to study movements from 'above', this chapter approaches theorising from 'below', described by Laurence Cox as being 'in dialogue with (movement) participants and their own modes of thought' (2013. 146). The analysis is grounded and 'layered' in that sense, where the focus is on the political economic structure and individual agency, as well as on the interactions unfolding therein. The overarching argument followed here is informed by a post-Marxian approach to understanding the interactions between state, capital and civil society (Cohen 1982).[5] In short, I examine the ways in which capitalist hegemony and rationality[6] are diffused and amplified through carefully contrived counter-campaigns launched in collaboration with institutionalised unions and the state. In this regard, I explore the ways in which the influence of capitalism affects the trajectory of social movement mobilisation in the region, with a specific focus on the ongoing labour-environmental conflicts.

The remainder of this chapter is organised to spell out the process through which the movement landscape is turned into an uneven field. This is achieved primarily through comparing the resource base, recruitment of participants and mobilisation strategies adopted by the union-industry nexus, as well as by the local green movement. Additionally, this chapter maps the resource imbalance and reflects on its ramifications for the stature of resource-mobilisation theory (RMT) as

a theoretical framework used to make sense of social movements. In so doing, it adds to its critique.

PMVS as a resource-poor movement

Led largely by daily-wage and contract labourers, the resource-base of PMVS is built on contributions from the members and crowdfunding from the community. Being a resource-poor movement, PMVS often had to improvise and adopt creative protest repertoires to fit budgetary limits, but it does not perceive that as a hindrance. When inquired about the influence of resources on its mobilising potential, Kumar immediately brushed aside such concerns in the following words:

> I do not think that resource is a constraint … people's movements have always been like this … they are something that is not built on money, but derives strength from the physical and mental tortures or oppressions they had faced … See, if I am someone who has to struggle with pollution on an everyday basis, the smell of sulphur dioxide or if I see my kids struggle with these issues of pollution, I will react as a human being … having money or the lack thereof is not a factor eliciting that response.

After a brief pause that grew to become a moment of heavy silence, he continued to talk about *Janakeeya Samarangal* (people's movements/struggles) and how they never were led by money, but driven solely by the power of people.

> I mean, we mobilise resources from the people … It is not a factor guiding our movement … it is not a precondition as far as we are concerned … When we call a bus to take protestors somewhere, we collect money from our own participants to pay towards that. Yes, we have incurred personal losses, but that is very usual for all movement actors. We have incurred losses trying to chip in when there are deficits. But having said that, a *Janakeeya samaram* [people's movement] is never led by money. It is driven entirely by the power acquired by people by going through severe adversities in the society … it is the grievance that drives us, the impacts created by the grievance leads them to the movement, not money.
>
> (Kumar, founding member and research co-ordinator of PMVS, personal interview, 26 May 2018)

Foregrounding the severity of environmental grievances experienced by the community, Kumar downplays the importance of financial resources when it comes to organising the movement against pollution. The quote above unequivocally declares that money is 'not a guiding factor' for PMVS, or for any mass movement, for that matter; they are primarily driven by grievances. However, Kumar's words also hint at the financial burden borne by movement actors as they seek to pull the ends together. Furthermore, amplifying the importance of grievances and how mobilising comes as possibly the only recourse to address the disruption in their everyday lives, green activists often invoke Marx's famous quote, 'the workers have nothing to lose but chains, the shackles of slavery'.[7] This counts as one of the many tones in which the greens fervently connect their frames with that of Marx's call for struggle, as laid out in the *Manifesto*, perceiving themselves similar to workers who risk losing nothing but their chains while organising against capitalist exploitation. So it is that PMVS, through their frames, explicitly claims itself to be another working-class struggle against capitalism, drawing from people's power (Piven and Cloward 1978).

It is apparent that PMVS joins a fleet of progressive movements organised by people at the receiving end of severe adversities; they often engage in fierce battles with the state and corporates in their fight for social and environmental justice. Labelled as 'environmentalism of the poor' (Martinez-Alier 2003), the success of these grassroots movements is not based on their capacity to amass money, but rather on the legitimacy of their demands, commitment of their leaders and participants and their resonance with working-class communities. Such movements also rely on a decentralised model of resource mobilisation in which each protest event is planned and executed using resources crowdsourced from the participants. Breaking away from a centralised model of organisation and resource mobilisation built around an elite model of power (McAdam 1982), the PMVS mobilises resources from the community without reaching out to the political or economic elites of the region for money. In doing so, the movement challenges the singular narrative surrounding resources and movements laid out in mainstream literature.

Additionally, the glaring presence of such resource-poor movements making long-standing impacts challenges the premise of the RMT model that deems resource infrastructure to be the most important factor for successful mobilisation. This does not mean that resource-scarce movements are a new variant that refutes RMT, as mass movements have always emerged from circumstances of scarcity. Yet movement

theorisations have chosen to ignore that reality in favour of the assumptions underlying the model.

However, despite brushing aside financial resources and their association with successful mobilisation, green activists made frequent reference to how the lack of money at their disposal has created unique impediments – particularly in maintaining organisational infrastructure that involves recurrent payments, such as an office space or a secure archive for campaign materials. In fact, the acute resource crunch facing PMVS is evidenced by its recent loss of office space for continuously defaulting on the payment of rent.

The lack of office space has recently (2017–18) forced the movement to move all of its campaign materials and documents to a small outhouse next to Ibrahim's house. The crunch prevents them from digitally archiving these resources or from carefully securing the remnants of their long-standing fight against pollution. When I inquired about preserving the campaign materials, Ibrahim started talking with enthusiasm. He explained:

> We have saved a copy of all our notices and flyers. We have this habit! The other day I was going through a few. When we had an office and all, we had well-maintained files. Now that we don't have an office, we had to move everything to a room next to my home.[8]

Entries made in my field journal further exemplify how the lack of resources thwarts the green movement's mobilisation processes and the archiving of its documents. An entry from 20 July 2018 provides a description of the room and the dilapidated state of the documents that was revealed:

> I visited Ibrahim *chettan*'s home to see their old files, newspaper cuttings, posters and flyers. The files were stored in a small shed, an outhouse, next to his house. The room was so small and had damp walls on all sides. The moisture inside the walls made prominent marks across the walls. My visit was immediately after the flood, and by the time we checked the files most of them were damaged by mould and mildew.

This dearth of financial resources has thus adversely affected the movement's ability to document its own struggles – based on activities spanning over 20 years, which have generated sackfuls of information on campaign outcomes and legal victories – or to archive campaign

materials produced along the way. The loss of office space has shifted their meetings into public spaces or into the private houses of the movement's members. In total contrast to the view held by Kumar, Rafeeq, another member of PMVS, explained how the movement feels constrained even in organising collective action events against pollution. In detailing the impact of this resource crunch on such campaigns, he gave the following example:

> To be honest, there are people who avoid our events because we ask for money [laughs]. That's our situation. We don't have money!! We struggled to organise so many events only because we did not have enough funds … We avoided FACT junction for a while because there was a printing press there and we owed them money for printing our pamphlets. We did not have money to pay it off. So, after a point, we stopped printing notices; instead, we took photostat (laughs), which would cost something 35 paise, lower than the printing charge, you know … Despite all such constraints, our struggle received international attention and that's a huge thing. (Rafeeq, member of PMVS, personal interview, 13 May 2018)

Irrespective of all the obstacles created by money, most green members appeared to be satisfied with the outcomes and the visibility that their campaigns garnered. Furthermore, these reflections by greens also hinted at how financial resources can at times create an uneven movement field. Pointing out the unique purpose that money serves for the union collective vis-à-vis the greens, Abdu alleges that:

> A movement like the union collective needs to focus on resources, because they need to offer money to recruit people for their events … They need to pay them and provide them with biryani and alcohol … but we don't do that.

Breaking down the minutiae of how money aids the counter-campaigns launched by the Standing Council vis-à-vis the campaign events organised by PMVS, Abdu continues:

> Resources help counter-campaigns to get the upper hand. For example, the union collective placed boards worth Rs.1,000,000 across the state alleging that I own illegal assets or own property in Wayanad. If 100,000 people happen to see and read that board,

> at least 100 people would believe the allegations presented on the board. If we were to do something, all we could do would be to print 1,000 notices or posters worth Rs.500 or print a few pamphlets … if we spent Rs.5,000 we may get 1,000 pamphlets; that's all we could do. (Abdu, member of PMVS, personal interview, 30 May 2017)

The statement above clarifies how access to resources can offer unfair advantages to movements and campaigns endowed with more money. Describing how the trade union collective manages to unleash massive counter-campaigns, Abdu talked about the lakhs of rupees spent on billboards and posters bearing allegations against the environmentalists. Having greater access to money enables movements to expand the scope of the campaign beyond the region, and can also aid the diffusion of the movement and movement frames across the state.

In comparison, the resource crunch affecting the local environmental movement forces them to reduce the spread of their campaign as they can only produce a limited set of campaign materials. For example, Kumar spells out the comparison in terms of the money spent on campaigns. When the union spends Rs.1,000,000 (around $14,000) on a single campaign, the greens scramble to decide between spending on posters worth Rs.500 ($7) or pamphlets worth Rs.5,000 ($70). This lays out the staggering difference between PMVS and the trade union collective regarding the resources at their disposal, which serves to create an uneven campaign field.

However, the leaders of the environmental movement are confident that these disparities in resources will not have long-standing consequences; they rather believe that 'the truth will triumph'. Focusing their arguments upon the positivistic nature of scientific experiments to be objective, valid and replicable, PMVS members explained how money could not revert science or scientific facts underlying the greens. The centrality of scientific evidence prevailing in the local environmental movement also opens greater avenues to inquire about the relations between science and activism surrounding environmental issues – particularly in a political climate characterised by the prevalence of post-truth rhetoric or the denial of climate change. The reliance on science may possibly also be traced back to the legacy of the People's Science Campaign in the state, in many of the founding members of PMVS have actively participated.

Funding countermovements

Expanding on the discussion surrounding the inequality in the access and distribution of resources, the following sections reveal how the alliance between industries and trade unions, and the monopoly over 'capital' enjoyed by the industries provide unique advantages to the union collective. This artifice of private capital within the realm of collective action spans the various aspects of mobilising – from recruitment of participants and framing to launching counter-campaigns in collaboration with trade unions. Some of these strategies include recruiting participants via promising monetary incentives and rewards, co-opting the union leadership or even bribing the state-owned PCB to deter punitive actions for violating pollution regulations. It is evident that by pumping more money into the movement field, the nexus between state and capitalists manipulates the modalities of social struggles to buttress their hegemony.

Paid protests and paid participants

One of the most important contrasts between the collective action events organised by the local green movement and the trade union collective (Standing Council) concerns the nature of their recruitment processes. When the green activists mobilised people disaffected by industrial pollution, the trade union collective often paid participants for their attendance. Throughout the interviews green activists elaborated on the process of participant recruitment used by the union collective and the local industries. Referring to one such instance when people from the region were paid to participate in protests, Anas, a green activist, stated:

> Unions are pretty sure that they won't have many participants for the events they organise. Whenever they organise events in S.C.S Menon Hall, they are pretty sure that they would not have many people showing up. So what they instead do is that … they would make *Kudumbashree* members attend the events, you know. These people cannot really say 'no' to the party. So they need to show up if they are told to attend. So similarly their workers … they would make their attendance mandatory. They would give a dictum, you know. They lure people with money. (Anas, a local environmentalist, and member of *Janajagratha*, personal interview, 6 July 2018)

Both trade unions and industries also resolved to use coercive tactics to recruit participants. This often entailed tapping into the pool of party members or affiliates, in addition to members of state-sponsored schemes such as 'Kudumbasree'[9] to bolster the number of attendees in protest events. A nexus between the state (at the Panchayath level, local self-government) and industries becomes apparent in the trade unions' access to self-help groups such as 'Kudumbashree'. From the standpoint of the unions, having mass-based participation is important to convince the public that the issue raised by the unions receives widespread support among ordinary people in order to counter PMVS, known for its social base.

Aside from resorting to 'bloc recruitment' from state-sponsored programmes, the unions worked hard to get factory workers to take part in the campaign. Jobs were often used as control mechanisms to ensure the participation and support of factory workers for these events of collective action. Narratives highlighted how the unions use the 'token system' (discussed in greater detail in the next chapter) to blackmail workers against joining local environmental action events. The token system required workers to have daily tokens, issued by the unions, to be able to work in factories. This system enabled unions to blackmail workers, forcing them to comply with the industries and preventing them from participating in the local environmental movement. Sathyan, a factory worker, explained how he was forced to take part in a protest event in Thiruvananthapuram.

> When they (union leaders) asked me to participate, I just told them that I cannot do this and expressed my reservations. But you should understand one thing. I am a factory worker, a worker who finds work in the factory through the union. So, even though the company is our employer, we join as union members. We get the job as union members. The bus to Thiruvananthapuram was scheduled to leave at 4. Around 3 am in the morning I received a call from a union leader. He said, 'Look, Sathyan, if you do not come for this event, you should not come to work from tomorrow'. So I participated. This is my only source of income; I have a lot of debt from building my house etc. And I don't want to leave my kids hungry. (Sathyan, a factory worker, personal interview, 22 July 2018)

The quote above explains the ways in which jobs are used coercively to recruit factory workers for the collective action events organised

by the unions. Fear of losing jobs forced workers to participate in the event in large numbers. According to another participant, the march primarily focused on the privatisation of mineral sand mining in Kerala – an issue affecting the prospects of private industry in the Edayar region. He stated that he participated in the march as a member of the AITUC. He went on to allege that the participation from across all unions imply that the industrialist has bought them all out.

While recounting the instances in which unions managed to organise 'paid protests', Akbar described the Secretariat March organised in Thiruvananthapuram as one where 'everyone was given money'. In breaking down the incentives and perks offered to protestors and elucidating the reward system, Akbar remarked:

> They organised a Secretariat March in Thiruvananthapuram; everybody was given money. They were provided with food, transportation, etc., and each participant was offered around Rs.1,500 (around $21). They arranged vehicles to transport the participants … that included PML workers and many other people from here … so this bus would cost around Rs.7,000 ($98.2) per day … and each of these buses can carry around 17–20 people. So, 17 multiplied by 1,500, they make this calculation and hand over the money, then and there. Even then not all participants received money … what they are saying is this: 'Let's go to Thiruvananthapuram, let's go and tour the place'. Once they reached the place, they would say, 'Hey, since we are here, let's take part in this event and then we can see the place', you know. That was how deceitful these people were. Most of the people did not receive the money as the middlemen managed to take it. They were taken to Thiruvananthapuram, were offered food … food was lavish is what I heard throughout the journey … bananas, bread and liquor for people who wanted that … but the money did not reach them … yes, the company provided money, but all of it did not reach the participants … I mean, these are all stories told by party members from other regions who attended this particular event. So that's how they organise protests. Paying to organise protests, you see. (Akbar, member of PMVS, personal interview, 20 July 2018)

This example illustrates the kind of money pumped into the movement landscape to organise this collective action event; in so doing it gives

a false impression of the movement's support base to the media, the bystanders and society at large. This is clearly an important strategy, developed to convince people and the media that the grievances or issues presented by the industry have wider support among its own workers and the larger community.

More importantly, the idea of paid protests and paid participation problematises the general understandings and theories surrounding movements. That is, if the success of movements is determined on the basis of their potential to mobilise resources and recruit participants, then this model of paid protests serves to derail such factors as indicators for the mass-support base (resource and participants) of the movement. However, the large number of participants in this context specifies nothing about the success of mobilisation processes of the union collective in terms of framing, building of solidarity or collective identity, nor of the extent of organisational efficiency. All it indicates is the power of monetary capital in bringing together other forms of capital necessary to stage a collective action event or protest. Apart from green activists, union members – particularly those members who openly disagreed with the politics of the frontline union leaders – talked about the issue of paid protests and recruitment of participation with deep concern.

Moving beyond grievances, the mobilising experience of SCTU shows how recruitment to protest events closely resembles the process of recruitment inside the labour market. In other words, rather than being driven by aggrieved groups, the privilege offered by capital transforms recruitment into a process of exchange inside the marketplace where a price, or perhaps a wage, is fixed for the act of participation. Direct exposure to pollution, emotions and the subjective interpretation of grievances dominated the narratives surrounding the motive of the green members. In contrast, the transfer of monetary incentives seemed to galvanise participants for the events organised by the union collective.

The stark contrast in the recruitment process complicates the emphasis on collective grievances as suggested by extant theories. More importantly, the narratives above establish the need to expand the perspective of resource mobilisation to include the complex ways in which access to financial resources facilitates and constrains movement emergence and growth. That is, it exposes the shortfalls of RMT that consider resource infrastructure as a pre-requisite for successful mobilisation. The omission of structural inequality in the distribution and access to resources is overlooked in the traditional perspective, in which evidence presented here explains how easy access to monetary resources and political power, in the perspective of movement actors, enable and

promote unfair advantages in terms of mobilisation and recruitment by opening up new pathways for recruitment.

Co-optation of the unions/buying out the leadership

One of the important modes through which industrial capitalism infiltrated the movement landscape is through the co-optation of the trade union groups that operate inside the industries and have strong affiliations to mainstream political parties. Below I demonstrate how the industrial workers' trade unions in Eloor, brought together under the aegis of SCTU, follow the global trend in which class antagonisms are institutionalised through the integration of working-class organisations into the state (Gorz 1968, 113). Such transformation of trade unions under a capitalist system, in which the unions now act as a 'mediating force between the working class and the system' (Gorz 1980, 87), ultimately lead to tensions between a union's rank-and-file members and its leadership. The stand-off between PMVS and SCTU could similarly be seen as a manifestation or juxtaposition of the transformation of trade union politics in Kerala: a movement from struggle to 'compromise' (Heller 1999).

Analysis of frames produced by the green movements indicate how the local industries managed to buy out the main leaders of the local trade unions. Problematising this nexus, the green activists allege that the industries offer financial incentives for union leaders to fight for the industries. Singling out the process of incentive distribution adopted by an industry called PML, one of the leading polluters in the region, Roopesh observed:

> Even now, most of the trade union leaders here go by the end of every month to collect a cover from industrial offices. This is quite the same as someone who would receive their monthly salary from that office. There are people who take autos, some of them go in their own vehicles, and all of them receive money enclosed in envelopes that carry their respective names. Even now this is happening. (Roopesh, factory employee and member of PMVS, personal interview, 27 May 2018)

The interviews with green activists and some trade union members indicated how this buy out of unions had played an instrumental role in fuelling the counter-movement and subsequent 'red-green conflicts'.

They highlighted how the industrial capitalists deployed a strategy of dividing the working-class by co-opting the union leadership, then pitting them against the local environmental movements. Moreover, leaning on a detailed analysis of the timeline of the origin and growth of the trade union collective, many green activists argued that the collective was revamped specifically to attack and repress the local green movement. Leaders of the local trade union movement, many of whom were unhappy with the institutionalisation of grievances by unions and complacency, confirmed this hypothesis. They pointed out how the collective was strengthened to protect the industries by countering the anti-pollution campaign.

> Talking about trade unions, they tend to protect the interests of workers and industries at the same time … When they strive to protect the interest of workers, there isn't much available to them in the form of 'rewards'. So they had to rely on industries to meet many of their daily financial needs. When I say financial needs, many of them are related to acquiring more material comforts. They rely on the industries to fulfil those. And that explains their servitude to industrialists. (Pramod, local union leader, personal interview, 4 June 2018)

When I asked if there were any discussion or tensions within the union movement regarding the flow of financial rewards from industries to the union leaders, Pramod responded in the affirmative. He explained how attempts to take action would immediately be thwarted by the union leadership using the leverages offered by a centralised organisational structure. While briefing the buy out of unions by local industries, Akbar referred to the financial incentives paid to union members as 'hush money', given for remaining silent on the issue of pollution. Elaborating the extent of co-optation of unions and its manifestation in disabling the fight against pollution, Akbar remarked:

> We don't even have to name them [unions], all of them; you know, all of them go there and receive this hush money. We will have no pollution if the trade unions here take a favourable stand. Because they work in these industries … all the workers will be part of some trade union. CITU: if CITU takes a firm stand against pollution, then there won't be any more pollution. During a news discussion I asked the leader of a major trade union this question: 'Isn't it easy for CITU to stop the pollution here? If your workers [members of

> CITU] take a stand where they refuse to release pollutants into this river, then we can stop this issue, right?' He was trapped. He was told that 'See, the capitalist is operating on profits, blah blah blah.' (Akbar, member of PMVS, personal interview, 10 May 2018)

Exposing the intricate linkage between capitalists and trade unions, the above quote highlights how the shifting politics of unions in favour of capital is not just ideological; it is also influenced by monetary incentives. It should be noted that such allegations about trade unions taking money from polluting industries are not raised by green activists alone. A few union members, on conditions of complete anonymity, also spoke at length about how capital has flooded the movement landscape by using trade unions as an agent.

Greening capitalism or greenwashing capitalism

The support offered by the state-union nexus for industries goes beyond the formation of a counter-campaign to include active strategies to manufacture consent in favour of industrial production. In the subsequent sections I unpack the modes through which counter-hegemony is actively produced and disseminated by the Kerala State Pollution Control Board (KPCB hereafter) and the industries to greenwash pollution. For the KPCB, protecting the industries largely pans out in the form of turning a blind eye to the discharge of untreated effluents or by helping the industries to evade regulatory mechanisms. Being a state agency charged with enforcing the laws related to environmental protection, KPCB's statements of denial regarding the role of industries in causing pollution played a huge part in legitimising the frames of the union collective.

Rewarding polluters with green awards

The collusion of chemical industries with trade unions to cover pollution is enhanced by the addition of the KPCB into the equation. Despite being the state agency mandated to regulate pollution, KPCB resolutely aids the local industries in circumventing pollution by manipulating the inspection reports. Media and green activists have been crying foul at the callous nature of KPCB's administration, which completely glosses over existing laws and regulations (John and Varier 2017; *The Times of India* 2018; Narayanan 2019). According to the greens, pollution issues could have been resolved easily had the KPCB done

its part, but nothing happens as all of them have 'succumbed to the capitalists'. Lamenting the lack of support from trade unions and KPCB officials in fighting pollution, Rafeeq remarked:

> So the trade unions can put an end to this pollution, if they wish to do so. That's one thing. Second, the Pollution Control Board (PCB) can put an end to this, if we had honest officials who would dare to enforce the laws that we already have – there won't be pollution. It's a curse that we don't have honest officials. A lot of this can be fixed if we have a proper police system. But all of these people have succumbed (*vazhanguka*) to the capitalists [industrialists], and that creates most of our issues. (Rafeeq, member of PMVS, personal interview, 13 May 2018)

Interviews such as the one presented above expose the issue of cronyism by elucidating how the trade unions and the state aligned with industries to cover up pollution concerns. In addition, to defuse the anti-pollution campaign, the local industries fervently target diligent PCB officers (*Manorama News* 2016) and bribe others who are mandated to monitor pollution (Neelakandan 2004). This complete and open alignment with industries has made the unions and KPCB subjects of intense scrutiny and criticism in the eyes of the local environmental movement.

Even during instances when the effects of pollution were apparent in the region, KPCB sought to distract and divert the focus away from the industries as a source of pollution (Al Jazeera 2023). Such a strategy, according to the local environmentalists, stands testimony to the strong nexus between industries and the Kerala Pollution Control Board officials. Despite this negligence in preventing pollution, the nexus becomes even more apparent when the KPCB gives awards to the industries that top the list of polluters in the campaigns organised by the greens and in legal fights, for, unbelievably, 'environmental excellence'. Pointing out the irony in giving awards to a company that tops the list of polluters, Pramod, a union member who also is a member of CPIM, remarked:

> This company, located on the other side of the Pathaalam bund, I don't mind naming it, you know … PML … out of all others, this company has been receiving the award for environmental excellence from the PCB. How ironic is that? There are public sector industries here that have installed extensive pollution regulation mechanisms over the years. But surpassing them all, this private company gets the award every year. I am not saying that industries

in the public sector are not polluting, you see. (Pramod, local union leader and member of CPIM, personal interview, 4 June 2018)

These awards play a huge role in legitimising the counter-frames produced by the industries and the union collective, denying the existence of industrial pollution. Members of the green movement, including PMVS and Janajagratha, often post on social media condemning and ridiculing inaction on the part of PCB. In one such post Advocate Khader, a leading environmental activist and legal counsel for the local environmental movements, observed, 'The Water Colouring Competition Continues. The PCB is busy giving marks!!' The post carried a snapshot of news reported on *The Hindu* (2019), an English-language news daily, under the title 'PCB examining white discharge spotted in Periyar'. The report carried a story about a 'thick white substance' that was spotted 'floating along the stretch of Periyar near the Pathalam regulator-cum-bund in the Edayar industrial area'. Such comments form part of many hundreds of posts and Facebook Live videos. In these local people and members of the green movement post pictures of the polluted river, industrial sludge floating along the surface or even fish kills.

Greenwashing pollution

Efforts are also made by the trade union collective to organise events surrounding the issue of the environment, such as 'Earth Day Celebrations' or 'tree planting events', in an attempt to greenwash local industries and create a counter to the local environmental movement. During an interview a union leader stated that the local greens do not have a monopoly over the environment and that these campaigns stand testimony to that. An extensive discussion of the ways in which unions manufacture consent in favour of capitalism is provided in Chapter 5. Almost all campaign materials published by the unions make a constant attempt to portray PML as a 'clean' and 'green' company.

Furthermore, the industry itself has adopted strategic frames to depict the industry, products and production processes as environmentally friendly. The tag line used by the industry, 'From Nature, With Nature, Into Nature', bears witness to this attempt. Ironically, however, the slogan also can be read as a form of cultural jamming, as the pollution is indeed released 'into nature'. It is also interesting to see how the unions work towards establishing the industry as a model of 'green capitalism', framing every activity or process as 'clean', 'safe' and 'natural'. Every discussion concerning the company in the newsletter published by

the union collective includes words such as 'pure', 'safe' and 'nature'. However, the green activists jokingly remark that the industry is kind enough to give back the pollution resulting from this 'clean' production to 'nature'.

Similar to the contents in the newsletter, and on the industry website, union leaders also talked extensively about the 'safer' processes of production adopted by PML. In an article published in the union newsletter Padmanabhan, a union leader and Secretary of the SCTU, re-emphasises the environmentally sensitive operations of this industry as follows:

> The main input used in PML is ilmenite (a black iron titanium oxide), a safe and non-hazardous mineral which they secure from IRE. Similar to ordinary sand, this sand is a natural material that is present in the river and beaches … Another input is hydrochloric acid, which is produced by combining common salt that we use for cooking and electricity. Again, this is non-toxic and non-hazardous … lime (calcium hydroxide), which is of supreme quality and made from natural components … All inputs are secured from nature. (SCTU 2013, 13)

The combined efforts undertaken by the KPCB and the Standing Council testify to the strong nexus between trade unions, KPCB and the industries in trying to portray PML as a 'green' company. These efforts also underscore how the KPCB facilitates the manufacturing of consent in favour of the local industries, particularly when other scientific studies confirm the presence of industrial pollutants in the river. According to the interviews and media reports, through bribes and incentives, the industries use KPCB as a mechanism to counter claims and scientific facts by producing alternative facts. For example, in issuing statements to the media, KPCB shifts the burden of causing pollution on to inland fish workers or on to urban sewage, but never on to the industries. Several of the interviews I conducted also mentioned the case of a PCB official who was tormented and transferred from the office for daring to take action against pollution industries. Remembering how the industries and unions drove him away, Roopesh stated:

> That official was straightforward and righteous, but then he was transferred. In fact, cases were laid against this particular official. The two police officers who were recently charged for a custody murder were behind framing a case against this PCB official.

> The case alleged that this officer violated laws while the sampling procedure. They won't let an honest official do his duty. They won't leave him off their hook. They will hunt him down, using the very same police force that's put in place to maintain law and order, that's the irony. (Roopesh, factory employee and member of PMVS, personal interview, 7 July 2018)

The above narratives clearly indicate how local industries have managed to buy out a state agency and pay for their continued compliance. Furthermore, they have sufficient power to attack and eliminate officials who dare to initiate action against the polluting industries. Interviews with the local environmentalists are replete with instances in which KPCB officials jeopardised, or gave secret information about, inspections or searches scheduled to take place in various industries. Members of green organisations often complained about the extent to which they had to go in order to get some attention from the KPCB, and to bring an official on-site when a mass release of effluents was occurring.

Such discussion points to a system that is rigged by the industries. They employ their nexus with political parties, trade unions and the state, enabling them to get away with everything. In addition to the statements from local environmentalists, the Supreme Court Monitoring Committee (SCMC) also made similar observations regarding the inefficiency of KPCB in monitoring pollution as follows (Shrivastava 2007). In sum, the operation of KPCB in the region exemplifies the ways in which capital can influence the state for its benefit – despite the ramifications it could have upon people and local resources.

Shifting political opportunities, hybrid environments

Apart from the stand-offs between unions and greens, capital also plays an important role in turning most of the mainstream political parties against the local environmental movement over the years. The changing political climate in the region is evidenced by the increasing rift between environmental activists and local politicians and elected representatives. According to the interviews, the shift has been so extreme that the political party members and local elites who once supported the fight against pollution later started openly to condemn and attack the green movement. Many local environmentalists flagged the role of local industries in causing this rift between green activists and local politicians – especially in the wake of the recent exposé that alleged

financial transfers between a local industry and political parties (*The Hindu* 2023). In discussing these shifting political structures, Zacharia highlighted the opportunism displayed by many local politicians in matters related to industrial pollution and placed it alongside the nexus that exists between industries, trade unions and political parties. Zacharia also describes how local industries control political parties in Kerala and the ramifications of this for the fight against pollution:

> The initial acts of protest against pollution received widespread support. I mean, everyone from the Panchayath president, members of the block panchayath and all political parties participated and co-operated in this event (the human chain). And that's one contrast between now and then. In the past, all political parties and members co-operated with environmental struggles, in fact, they wanted to improve the river. But today it's the reverse. Today they have taken a stand to protect themselves, and it doesn't matter if that would cost the river or the soil or even the entire earth … They will announce the award from PCB in June, on the 5th of June to be precise. And they are going to give that award to PML, and they have been receiving this award for more than ten years, in a row. Environmental Excellence Award for a company that Pollutes with Excellence!!! The river flows in many different colours because of its operation, and yet this company receives this award. (Zacharia, a local environmentalist from Edayar, personal interview, 7 July 2018)

As detailed in the quote above, the growing affinity between industries and local politicians is evidenced by the withdrawal of trade unions, affiliated to political parties and local elected representatives from the Anti-Pollution Campaign. The narratives detail how the politics of unions and parties have shifted from protecting the river to protecting themselves. In addition, the excerpt above alleges that all leading political parties are controlled by local industries; it singles out one company (PML) as the leading player in buying out the political parties. This tactic of co-optation and hijacking is not confined to political parties but also expands to trade unions. They have strong affiliations to political parties and consequently strong access to the centres of power. In clarifying the nexus between unions, political parties and the industries, Martin, a green activist, observed:

> This is what trade unions and political parties are doing. All of them are aligning to protect the interests of PML. None of them

> would raise a voice against PML. He bought all of them for money. From a point where all the political parties co-operated with the movement … now we have reached a phase where none of them stand with our movement or for the environment. That's a massive change. After a while, the owner of PML realised that it's only by buying the voices of the people who hold power that he can curtail the issues caused by this movement. Since he has bought all the politicians, now he owns their power. See if a media person approaches him to talk about the issues here, he will first hand them over a CD. It has all the information that he wants to be on the media. This includes allegations against Kumar also. He would also ask you, 'How much money would you take? 10 lakhs ($14,023) …20 lakhs ($28,047)? You can have any amount, but you have to write about me'. He is willing to spend any amount because he is getting crores of turnover from the mineral-sand industry. (Martin, member of PMVS, personal interview, 9 July 2018)

This excerpt also touches upon the issue of paid news, a topic that came up frequently during the interviews. Many green activists explained how a few weekly magazines publish stories demeaning the local environmental movement, in contrast to almost all leading newspapers and weeklies which publish stories accurately depicting the struggles with pollution. This intricate linkage between industries, trade unions and local political parties explains how money and access to the centres of power enable the industries to engage in pollution without fear of retribution. Most protests organised by the unions in support of such industries also received huge support from the state and the ruling government. Describing one such protest that was attended by the then Chief Minister of the state, Kumar observed:

> Every time the trade unions organised a protest … it's hard to pinpoint a date and say in 2010 or 2012 … because this happened all the time … Someone from the state committee or sometimes the ministry attended. If Achuthanathan came one year to address the protest that was organised, then Pinarayi came to the other, then someone else will address the event the year after, you know? In 2015 or 2012, I think, all of them, all of them attended the events. This was featured in all media outlets. In fact, huge sums of money were given to media companies to cover the protest live; the organisers had asked them to park their OB (outside broadcasting) vans near the protest site. Whether such an event was covered live

> or not is a different issue, I think one or two featured this news? But you imagine, they offered money to bring and park the OB van. (Kumar, founding member and Research Co-ordinator of PMVS, 26 May 2018)

The open declaration of support by Kerala's prominent communist leaders to the counter-movement organised by the unions disappointed the green activists, many of whom continue to be members of the Communist Party. As detailed in the quote above, the support from state and mainstream political parties reaffirmed the power and visibility of the counter-movement organised by trade unions against the green movement. Moreover, this support of states and industries enabled the counter-movement to occupy a position of privilege in terms of both resources and institutional power.

Discussion

In a backdrop where much of the literature overlooks the role of the political economy of capitalist production in influencing the trajectory of movements, this chapter opens a window on to the many interactions between capital, trade unions and local social movements. In so doing it explores what it means to communities who rely on collective action as a strategy to bring about socio-ecological transformations.

Capitalism and social movements

The data and analysis presented in this chapter uncover the ways in which capitalism infiltrates the movement landscape and influences the mobilisation tactics and processes of social movements. Despite the absence of capitalism from mainstream literature, the narratives presented here underscore how capitalism and anti-capitalist framings were – and continue to be – important parts of the local environmental movement. The strong presence of anti-capitalist sentiments in the movement frames serves to highlight how capitalism has long been part of the mobilisation and framing processes of the local environmental movement led by the PMVS. Moreover, these discussions portray how capitalism and capitalist institutions have long been the source of environmental grievances – and thus the primary target of local environmental movements (Hetland and Goodwin 2013) in the Global South. In a way, these excerpts highlight the

conspicuous absence of movements from the Global South, particularly postcolonial settings, in the mainstream literature on social movements (Almeida 2019).

Aside from uncovering the centrality of capitalism in studying movements, this chapter also identifies the unique ways in which capitalism has influenced and exacerbated conflicts between labour and green movements in the region. In particular, the co-optation of unions as detailed in this chapter created long-standing consequences in the region by nurturing schisms between the two movements and creating a vacuum in the movement landscape. These consequences have been achieved by ensuring that the unions remain silent on issues pertaining to the rights, life and resource access of the factory workers and larger community.

Such developments are important considering both the long history of working-class movements in Kerala and the images and tags of emancipatory and social justice that people often associate with the trade union movement there. The data presented in this chapter indicate and confirm a drastic shift in labour politics in the state (Heller 1995). Such a shift in labour politics plays a prominent role in affecting and derailing the relationship between labour and green movements, a process discussed in greater detail in the next chapter. The ways in which unions act as 'defenders' or 'protectors' of local industries, resorting to the organisation of paid protests and creating frames to establish the industries as 'green capitalists', thereby trying to manufacture support for industrial capitalism, serves to signify the extent and depth of the nexus between unions and industrial capitalists.

Moreover, the use of state machinery through KPCB in order to manufacture evidence in favour of industries exposes the access enjoyed by such industries to the higher echelons of power. Future research is required to uncover and understand the ways in which people – not directly involved with the green movement or trade unions – perceive capitalism and its role in engendering the crisis in the Eloor-Edayar industrial belt. The discussions presented in this chapter exemplify how capitalism manages to repress and demobilise social movements that challenge the logic of accumulation. It demonstrates how capitalism co-opts progressive social movements, bribes state institutions and build nexus with the state machinery to ensure that accumulation happens without impediments. In other words, the evidence presented here shows the extent to which crony capitalism has occupied the movement space and entrenched itself into the social and political fabric even of a

state such as Kerala, which has a very long history of working-class and anti-capitalist struggles.

Resources, rationality and participation

Another important factor highlighted in this chapter is the issue of resource mobilisation. The chapter demonstrates the benefits of having a political economy lens to understand the ways in which structural inequality impedes the access and distribution of resources and power. In order to legitimise the operation of industries in the region, the local industries openly back many of the events organised by the trade union collective. Such a discrepancy in resource access between the two movements should be considered in the context of theoretical discussions surrounding the importance of resource mobilisation and social movements, as expounded in the RMT (McCarthy and Zald 1977; 2001). Even when the excerpts above reaffirm the importance of resources in successful mobilisation and organisation of collective action, the argument of this chapter exposes the problems associated with the RMT perspective in precluding or omitting the issue of structural inequality in the distribution of, and access to, various modes of resources (Ferree 1992). In other words, resources play a prominent role in facilitating the emergence, growth and sustenance of social movements.

However, it would then be a grave error not to recognise the structural advantage enjoyed by movements organised by individuals or organisations that enjoy privileged access to the centres of power and financial resources. For example, while the local green movement struggles to mobilise resources, the union collective, backed by the industries themselves, can organise collective action events across the Eloor-Edayar industrial belt. The access to 'capital' enables the industries to fund widespread campaigns to support their interests by paying local people to participate in collective action.

The model of participation built on monetary rewards and coercion, discussed above, have to be placed in opposition to theories of recruitment and participation that explain participation as something rooted in exposure to the grievances or sympathy with the cause for which the protest is organised. One can extrapolate the discussions of participation within RMT rooted in neoclassical rationality (Buechler 2000, 2016) to explicate how money is the selective incentive here (Olson 1965) that encourages participation – or that participation is the result of a cost-benefit calculation in which the cost of losing one's job

outweighs the benefits of non-participation. To put it differently, none of these perspectives highlights the influence of the political economy and a local political structure characterised by a strong nexus between state, capital and the unions.

The excerpts presented here embellish the importance of considering political and economic factors as oppressive systems, or systems of domination able to elicit or demand participation from workers. The use of money makes the transaction appear voluntary, encouraging participants to believe that they have benefited from participating in the event. In other words, the industries and unions use money to create a false consciousness, in which participants feel as though they are benefiting from the event financially. In reality they are enhancing the process of building hegemony and consent surrounding the capitalist model of natural resource exploitation.

In addition, the idea of luring people with money should not be interpreted as a stellar case for supporting neoclassical economic rationality and instrumental action (Ferree 1992; Buechler 2000). In other words, the fact that capitalism could recruit people by paying them should not be viewed as a complete vindication of a rational choice model, but perhaps rather as a consequence of capitalism rupturing social relations, communities and group solidarities. It would be erroneous to assume that people are guided by rational self-interest based on this exemplar, as it ignores how the entry of industrial capitalism bolstered a system of economic dependence in which people's everyday lives are reliant on the industries' economic success.

One of the acknowledged shortcomings of this analysis is the limited number of interviews conducted with people who participated in the paid protests, so as to make subjective interpretations surrounding the rationalisation of participation in these paid events. Despite such limitations, however, the data presents a clear variety of factors and forms in which movements operate, recruit participants, frame grievances and environmental problems, organise protests and engage in other mobilisation processes. That in turn establishes the need for future research to understand the subjective aspects of participation.

The analysis of paid protests is centred around only a few cases of protests and marches organised by the unions. This could be considered to be another limitation of this analysis. Yet the extensive data surrounding the presence of other similar instances in Kerala underscores the need to conduct more in-depth analyses in order to understand the extent and dynamics of paid protests in the state. Furthermore, despite the limited instances and cases, the paying of participants opens new avenues

of inquiry and enables the construction of clear contrasts between the mobilisation processes of trade unions and that of the local green movements in the Eloor-Edayar industrial belt.

Despite the limitations involved in bringing a few protest events to the centre of this analysis and argument, it is hard to dismiss the ways in which access to money can create incentives for participation. Moreover, the examples and narratives reaffirm how the monopoly over capital and the nature of economic relations enables industries and affiliated unions to deploy coercive mechanisms to elicit people's support. In other words, the control over capital and the embeddedness of the region and its workers within the capitalist economy create a particular form of dependent relationship that forces workers to participate in events organised in favour of the industries and to display their support. More research can answer questions about the motives of participation and thus engage with theoretical debates surrounding rationality and social context (Ferree 1992).

It is compelling to examine further the 'hegemonic coalition' that exists between the unions, industries and the state, especially when this coalition emerged strongly, while looking for reasons that create and sustain the conflicts between trade unions and local environmental movements. Perhaps the hegemonic coalition, formed around the ideology of capitalist development, explicates the lack thereof between unions and green organisations. The coalition thus indicates the complex interplay of ideational factors in addition to structural ones in producing the tensions.

Expanding on this nexus between trade unions and local industries, Chapter 5 explores the impact such a nexus has on the relationship between labour and green movements. Grounded in the discussions surrounding the shifting labour politics in Kerala, the next chapter considers how a shift in class politics has impacted the relationship of labour movements with other social movements in Kerala. In doing so, Chapter 5 seeks to debate the continued relevance of class in understanding social movement mobilisation and explicates the heterogeneity of working-class as a category. It also seeks to understand why these two movement groups, despite their similar class backgrounds, share a conflictual relationship.

Notes

1 This nexus between private capital and the state has been well explored in the Indian context, especially in terms of the concentration of economic power (Hazari 1966; Dutt 1969), but it has been largely confined to economic planning in the pre-liberalisation period.

2 Capitalism defined as a free-market system characterised by competition, buttressed on the principle of laissez-faire and guided by the motive of profits remains dominant in the existing literature (Kocka 2016; Fulcher 2015; Wood 2002). There are also scholars who argue that the operation of an ideal capitalist economy in India is impeded by 'the incumbents', who have an established position in the marketplace and would like to keep it exclusive and 'the distressed', who have 'lost out in the creative destruction unleashed by the markets' (Rajan and Zingales 2004,1). Such conceptualisations confine capitalism to the realm of production, exchange and valorisation. The approach used here adopts a view that aligns more closely to neo-Marxian reinterpretations that locate capitalism's infiltration to the 'lifeworld' of people (Habermas 1981), with a focus on the sphere of collective action.

3 Elucidating this limited interaction between the 'system' and the 'social', Bhambra (2016) observes that 'Sociology's orientation to history has generally been based around an implicit consensus on the emergence of modernity and the related "rise of the West", as well as around a stadial idea of progressive development and the privileging of Eurocentred histories in the construction of such an account' (Bhambra 2016, 962).

4 Following the critique posed by Barker et al. (2013), studies have also emerged in the Indian context that integrate capitalist system into movement analysis. See Nilsen and Nilsen (2015) and Motta (2016) for further information.

5 Even when we call out the omission of capitalism from Western movement studies, there have been forceful discussions about Marxian theory and its continued relevance in understanding new social movements through the neo-Marxian theorists. For example, in *Class and Civil Society*, Cohen (1982) attempts to expose the problematics of the continued reliance on Marx to understand contemporary movements using the binary of reform vs. revolution. In addition, Cohen points out the difficulties in using class as a category that enables unification. As an alternative, she suggests stratification, and in doing so proposes a post-Marxist critical theory.

6 The use of the term 'capitalist rationality' here is inspired by a similar usage by Andrea Gorz, 'rationality of capital', in her work *Ecology as Politics* (Gorz 1980, 15).

7 Personal interview with Kumar, founding member and research co-ordinator of PMVS, conducted on 7 June 2018.

8 Personal interview with Ibrahim, member of PMVS, conducted on 20 July 2018.

9 A micro-finance endeavour started by the Kerala State Government with the twin aims of alleviating poverty and empowering women. Roughly translated as 'The wealth of family' (denoting women as the family's 'wealth' or source of prosperity), this programme has been critiqued for presenting women as subjects of state welfare without addressing structures of patriarchy in family and society (Devika and Thampi 2007; Devika 2016).

5
Moving beyond class?

> Capitalism brings forth the workers it needs, with attitudes shaped by capitalist institutions. It also tends to bring forth the unions it needs as well.
>
> (*Can the Working Class Change the World?*, Michael D. Yates, 2018, 48)

In this chapter I explore the factors that produce and sustain tensions between trade unions and the local environmental movement. Analysing the movement frames and interpretations, I illustrate how the two movements employ the interests of workers to legitimise their struggles. The subsequent discussion demonstrates the heterogeneity of workers' interests in the region and how these are contingent upon sectoral location (agrarian vs. industries/formal vs. informal), resource dependence and the extent to which jobs are embedded within the political economy of industrial development.

In doing so, this chapter exposes the problematics of treating 'working class' as a universal and homogenous category. Accordingly, it also situates the ongoing conflicts within the larger backdrop of Kerala's shifting labour politics. I argue that the 'class compromise' between industrial workers' trade unions and industrial capitalists manifests in the conflicts between the unions and grassroots environmental movements. That is because, despite belonging to the broader spectrum of left-of-centre political orientations, the stand-off between the two movement groups stems largely from their competing interpretations and framings surrounding class, class consciousness and communist politics. Through such analysis, the discussion highlights the need for a middle ground between structural class theory and the 'cultural turn' (Nash 2001) by demonstrating how

structure (economic interests) and culture (framing) work together in class formation, a cohesion that in turn impels social action.

Introduction

'We too would have been victims (Gandhi-Marx)' reads the caption of an image posted on Facebook by Kumar Eloor, the frontline leader of the *Periyar Malineekarana Virudha Samithi* (Periyar Anti-Pollution Committee) or PMVS. The photograph below (Figure 5.1) showcases a piece of graffiti created by *Kalaakakshi* (a progressive group of artists who combine art and protest) as a protest-art during the concluding meeting of 'The Rivers Must Flow'[1] – a state-level campaign designed to spread awareness about the importance of conserving rivers and to serve as a tribute to the late environmentalist Dr Latha Anantha. The graffiti condemns the effects of pollution using images of two philosophers who played instrumental roles in the history of movements against oppression. Painted in shades of blue and pink, the graffiti depicts Mahatma Gandhi and Karl Marx wearing industrial masks to avoid the deadly effects of pollution. Above the respective images the artists also wrote these quotes: 'Life is linked to nature. For man is part of NATURE' (Marx) and 'Earth provides enough to satisfy every man's needs, but not every man's GREED' (Gandhi). A member of the legal counsel has added 'Green Salute' as a comment on Facebook, beneath the image.

Figure 5.1 Graffiti portraying Karl Marx and M.K. Gandhi in industrial masks, 2019. Courtesy of Periyar Malineekarana Virudha Samithi, Purushan Eloor.

The graffiti (Figure 5.1) presents both the environmental politics in Eloor and its strong roots within the traditions of Marxism. A careful exploration of the history of environmentalism in the region shows that the local environmental movement draws heavily from the ideology of the left, even as it employs Gandhian modes of non-violent protest/direct action. The image succinctly brings out the red shades of green politics, both in Kerala in general and the Eloor-Edayar region in particular. Moreover, the very long history of working-class movements and the red shades of green politics in Kerala complicate pre-existing readings and interpretations of labour-environmental conflicts. It shifts the discussion of labour-environmental conflicts from the realm of 'red-green conflicts' to that of 'red-red conflicts,' in which both movements declare their ideological affiliations to Marxism.

The working-class base of the local environmental movement, in this case, defies the class-based theories that expound such conflicts merely as tensions between opposing class interests and cultures. This is mainly because the presence of individuals from working-class backgrounds on either side of the conflict would imply that the antagonism can no longer be explained or interpreted as a confrontation between middle-class environmentalists and working-class trade unions. For that reason, it becomes imperative to reconceive labour-environmental conflicts in the Eloor-Edayar industrial belt by moving beyond generalised, class-based explanations.[2] If both movements are sustained by those from working-class backgrounds, why do they continue to fight instead of forming an alliance along class lines? Why does class fail to operate as a factor that unifies the interests of unions and green movements? How can we explain the lack of class solidarity among workers on either side of this conflict? The rest of this chapter aims to answer these questions by examining the narratives of unions and green movements as they try to explain the ongoing conflicts, the role of class and the problematic nature of left-wing politics in neoliberal Kerala.

Theory building from below

The literature on social movements in the post-1960s is replete with claims about the demise of class in social movement mobilisation. Such claims surrounding the 'death of class' largely stemmed from the emergence and growth of non-class-based social movements during the 1960s and 1970s (for more details see Cohen 1985; Buechler 1995; Rootes 2004). However, much of the research on labour-environmental

conflicts focuses largely on class as an explanatory factor; this is particularly notable given the declining popularity of class within social movement studies. Such studies argue that the difference in class-based interests engenders the conflicts between labour and green movements. Much of this divergence can also be attributed to the existence of these fields as separate and exclusive, with very few interactions (except for Obach 2004a and Mayer 2009).

Besides, a major share of studies on labour-environmental conflicts is confined to Western contexts. An almost exclusive focus on Western contexts and cases has led to a reductive conception of environmentalism as a middle-class phenomenon guided by postmaterial value orientations. This proposition is guided by new social movement theories that infer the presence of a 'New Class' operating beyond class-based grievances or identities (Buechler 1995; 2011). Accordingly, the extant studies explain labour-environmental conflicts as being poised between working-class labour movements and middle-class environmental movements – popularly referred to as 'the jobs vs. the environment trade-off'.

However, because these studies[3] consider selective Western contexts, they leave out the historical and contemporary environmental movements in the Global South,[4] and in the Global North, led by poor and working-class people (Guha 1989; Guha and Gadgil 1993, 1995 Martinez-Alier 2003; Guha and Martinez-Alier 2013; Taylor 2002; Montrie 2011, 2018). Such singular conceptions of environmentalism as a middle-class phenomenon, devoid of material grievances, originate largely from an omission of environmentalism of the poor and their social contexts. In this context, this chapter seeks to challenge and expand extant studies on labour-environmental movements by bringing a case of labour-environmental conflicts in India to the centre of this inquiry. This chapter is therefore also an attempt to decolonise the research examining labour-environmental conflicts by specifically considering a postcolonial setting and participants.

This chapter aims to fill this void in the existing literature by focusing on the labour-environmental conflicts in the Eloor-Edayar industrial region in Kerala, a setting in which both movements have working-class backgrounds. Such an inquiry assumes relevance given the pivotal role occupied by worker-grievances in the mobilisation processes and collective action frames of both the labour and green movements. Furthermore, this chapter addresses the shortcomings of structural social research paradigms that attempt theory construction 'from above' by exposing the intersections of structure and agency through

a combination of political economy and grounded theory approaches. Inspired by attempts such as Chibber's (2022,16) to 'develop a theory of class structure and class formation by way of response to the cultural turn', the analysis strives to understand how structure and cultural factors intersect to form classes, which then engage in social action. Interwoven between structural location and meaning orientations, the book exposes the complex processes involved in the formation of classes, class consciousness and class struggle as experienced by the members of trade unions and local green organisations.

In addition, the aim here is also to update and expand the theoretical understanding pertaining to labour-environmental conflicts using an ethnographic approach. Guided by a combination of the extended case method (Burawoy 1998, 2009, 2019) and grounded theory approach (Charmaz 2014), I seek to identify the limitations and expand class-based theories by shedding light on the diversity of working-class interest and identities; in so doing I reveal how in the context of Kerala that makes generalised, class-based explanations redundant. Through such discussion this chapter contributes to the field of labour-environmental conflicts, social movement studies and intra-class conflicts.

Class and social movements in Kerala

Class has played an important role in the social history of Kerala, dating back to peasant revolts and agrarian struggles against the landed aristocracy as well as the era of colonial rule (Isaac 1983; Kurup 1988; Namboodiripad 1984). The legacy of class politics and the framing of grievances has played a prominent role in shaping the unique trajectory of development and public action in the state (Kannan and Pillai 2005 Isaac and Harilal 1997). Furthermore, the prevalence of a well-organised trade union movement not only signifies the state's commitment to working-class politics (Kannan 1998), but also made it infamous for its 'militant' unions among the capitalists.

However, during the 1980s the class politics of labour can be seen undergoing a transformation, in tandem with the global trend[5] (Tronti [1974] 2019; Offe 1985; Gorz 1997; Clawson [2003] 2019, Lebowitz 2003); the trade unions in Kerala institutionalised grievances and embraced a relationship of compromise[6] instead of conflict with the capitalist project (Heller 1999). This shift in class politics, wherein labour joins hands with capital, was studied largely in terms of its impact on economic development (Heller 1995). As a result, questions

surrounding the fallouts of such a shift on the local environment ('the conditions of production') or its implications on unions' relationship with other progressive movements remain underexamined.[7]

It is in this context that I probe into how this shift in class politics manifests in labour's interaction with local environmental struggles. In addition, these explorations also emphasise the continued relevance of class in movement analysis, while pointing out the limitations of homogenising definitions and interpretations of class categories. To put it another way, this chapter strives to challenge and expand class-based understandings of labour-environmental conflicts by recognising the importance of class, even as it underscores the differences between objective interests and subjective interpretations and reveals the limitations of monolithic conceptions (Thompson 1964; Cohen 1982; Wright 2015).

Moreover, active debates around the definitions and conceptualisations of class[8] in contemporary capitalist societies have largely focused on advanced capitalist contexts (Lukács 1972; Cohen 1982; Wright 1998; Lebowitz 2003). These discussions have moved beyond the polarised version of class analysis to grapple with the complexities of a non-polarised society in which it becomes hard to segregate people into two watertight class categories: the bourgeoise and the working class. Attempts have been made by neo-Marxist, post-Marxist and structural Marxist scholars to revamp class analysis[9] (by introducing a new revolutionary agent or attributing rationality to new classes or drawing new boundaries) in order to explain the new social strata and social movements proliferating in contemporary capitalistic societies (Cohen 1982; Burawoy 1982, 2023).

As with most other theories, the focus of these debates on postindustrial settings leaves out questions on the changing nature and characteristics of social classes in postcolonial societies, where the mode of production has not entirely transformed to become capitalist. As a reflection of this, more than 80 per cent of the Indian workforce are in the informal sector of the economy, where precapitalist modes co-exist with capitalist modes (Sanyal 2014; Breman 2019). Furthermore, to identify the unorganised workers in the informal sector as petty bourgeoisie does not account for the exploitation and appropriation of their labour power in the hands of local and global capitalism as they struggle to eke out a living. This consequently makes it more pertinent to classify 'working class' as a category that includes workers in both the organised and unorganised sectors (Chakrabarti and Dhar 2020; Basu 2009). Moreover, the proliferation of precarious and gig work

calls for a renewed understanding of class that transcends the idea of a 'structure' or 'category' to become a historical relationship that unifies people.

To be able to capture the complexity of deprivation and precarity under neoliberalism, this chapter relies on Thompson's conceptualisation of class that emphasises the subjective aspects. In Thompson's words, 'class happens when some men, as a result of common experiences (inherited or shared), feel and articulate the identity of their interests as between themselves, and as against other men whose interests are different from (and usually opposed to) theirs' (Thompson 1964, 9). It can be observed that the 'new working class' studies have emerged largely developing and improvising on labour studies and labour history (Russo and Linken 2005). In clarifying what is 'new' about new working-class studies, Russo and Linken (2005, 10–11) explain the mandate as follows:

> We ask questions about how class works for people at work, at home and in the community. We explore how class both unites and divides working-class people … In the twenty-first century, perhaps more than ever before, defining who is or is not working class is a slippery, complex task, and class as a concept carries multiple, contradictory and complementary meanings … New working-class studies takes as its mission not the struggle among scholars and theorists to reach agreement about what class is, but rather the exploration of how class works, as both an analytical tool and a basis for lived experience.

As noted by the authors, the aim here is to also delve deeper into the ways in which class works for people working in various sectors of Indian economy, irrespective of the traditional contours that confine them to categories based only in terms of their ownership of the means of production. Emulating the approach suggested by the new working-class studies, this chapter strives to understand the complicated and contradictory ways in which class and interest operate in everyday life, especially surrounding the issue of industrial pollution in the Eloor-Edayar region. In doing so, it also becomes important to extend this approach beyond the subjective and relational operations of class to situate it also within the context of capitalist production and its impact on both labour and nature.

Furthermore, by illustrating the diversity of economic interests prevailing among the workers on either side of the conflict, this

chapter expands analysis of the existing research. It highlights the fragmented nature of class formation and considers how this challenges the conception of working-class as a homogenous and static feature of capitalism (Chandavarkar 1994, 1998; De Neve 2019). In other words, the confrontation between the two movements in the Eloor-Edayar region demonstrates the diversity of overlapping and intersecting working-class sections marked in the literature on the sociology of Indian labour (Chandavarkar 1998, 9).

Intersection of class and environmental inequality

Beyond the conceptualisation of class as a shared experience and identity with its myriad complexities and contours, it is also pertinent to locate this within the context of capitalist production and exploitation. This chapter thus tries to understand 'the working class' as an identity comprised of subjective interpretations and experiences, but without completely losing focus on the material grievances endured – due to its objective existence within capitalism and in relation to (class in itself) or as a response to (class struggle) capitalist appropriation of labour and natural resources. Furthermore, the analysis leans on Thompson's conceptions of the social formation of classes and the process through which people discover themselves as belonging to particular classes (class consciousness). According to Thompson:

> people find themselves in a society structured in determined ways … they experience exploitation … they identify points of antagonistic interests, they commence to struggle around these issues and in the process of struggling they discover themselves as classes, they come to know this discovery as class consciousness. Class and class consciousness are always the last, not the first, stage in real historical process. (Thompson 1978, 149)

That is, instead of treating class as something that is given, this work seeks to understand the social formation of class and class consciousness in the region, set against the backdrop of industrial capitalism, economic exploitation, the struggles against environmental damage and consequent inequalities and the nexus between state, industries and the trade unions. In this regard I explore the intersectionality of class and environmental inequalities that often create social movements such as PMVS to fight environmental issues produced by industrial capitalism.

The analysis is therefore also grounded in a structural view of inequality that explicates how ecological degradation is an inherent part of capitalist society and class struggle (Foster 1993, 2000; Wright 2015). Traditional Marxian approaches interpret class 'relationally' where class is defined in terms of the extraction of economic surplus facilitated through the unequal ownership of the means of production as well as the social relations of production it entails (Wright 1998, 2002, 2005). However, studies have underscored the importance of tracing environmental problems and consequent inequalities to the workings of a capitalist economic system[10] (Magdoff and Foster 2011; Burkett 2006). These works highlight how capitalism not only creates inequality through unequal ownership of the means of production, but also exacerbates environmental inequalities by destroying the conditions of production. Furthermore, it leans on the idea of class and class consciousness not as a default, but rather as something that evolves in relation to the system of capitalist production. Building on these approaches, this chapter explores how destruction of the conditions of production under industrial capitalism serves to engender tensions among labour and working-class environmental movements in Kerala.

Regarding the definition of class, Burnham notes that it is important to consider control of the conditions of production as much as the degree of ownership of the means of production while identifying class positions. In his words, 'exploitation (not consciousness or common awareness)' is the hallmark of class (2002, 117). Pellow similarly observes how environmental inequality 'addresses more structural questions that focus on social inequality (the unequal distribution of power and resources in society) and environmental burdens' (Pellow 2000, 582).

Elaborating on the class dimension of environmental exploitation, Newell notes that

> in environmental terms, an understanding of the operations of the ruling class reveals the ways in which decisions get made that systematically distribute risk and hazard to the poor while at the same time preserving the privilege and property of the bourgeoisie. (Newell 2005, 81)[11]

Drawing from these approaches,[12] the chapter conceives class to be based on both economic and environmental exploitation created and perpetuated by the capitalist system of production. In that respect, this chapter relies on an interpretation of class that considers both economic

and environmental exploitation by capitalism (Harvey 1976; Stevis and Assetto 2001; Gordon 2004; Magdoff and Foster 2011).

Significantly, the rationale of this inquiry into the class dynamics of labour-environmental conflicts is to understand how class permeates and influences contemporary social movements in Kerala. In brief, this chapter examines the nature of class politics in the Eloor-Edayar industrial region and considers how that informs and extends the debates surrounding class, class consciousness and class compromise[13] in Kerala's socio-political landscape (Heller 1995, 1999; Wright 2000; Chibber 2005). Breaking away from structuralist tendencies to impose concepts on to people's narratives, the attempt here is to let categories emerge from the narratives themselves. Class, for that reason, is treated as an emergent, heuristic and analytical category for the rest of this chapter.

The remainder of this chapter demonstrates how labour-environmental conflict transforms into a confrontation in which both movements highlight the grievances and interests of workers, especially those who occupy differential sectoral locations. In other words, the divergent interpretations surrounding class, work and interests emergent from the movement frames serve to exemplify the heterogeneity of working-class interests, and the ways in which this generates schisms within the same class. Building on theories of political economy, this chapter also probes into the nexus between unions and industries, exploring how unions manufacture consent and defend the hegemony of industrial capitalism.

Through this analysis I explain how the shift in class politics in Kerala facilitates the formation of this nexus, where trade unions and industries join hands to repress green organisations. I establish the need to move beyond class-based interests and consider the political economy of industrial development in order to understand tensions between unions and green movements in postcolonial settings. This chapter finds that the environmental movement is guided by a broader conception of class, one that encompasses toiling workers across the sectors. In this it contrasts with trade unions, who abide by a narrow conception of class confined to sectoral interests and loyalties. Such opposing views on class become more evident in considering the many shades of left-wing politics that are branching out in Kerala.

Is PMVS an anti-capitalist environmental movement?

In this section I explore the social roots of the local environmental movement constituted by different green groups, including PMVS

and Janajagratha (People Vigilante) and consider how that problematises existing conceptions of labour-environmental conflicts. As discussed in the previous chapters, the local environmental movement organisations in the Eloor-Edayar region consist primarily of poor and marginalised people who bear the brunt of industrial pollution. Joining a long list of poor and working-class environmental movements of the Global South, the green movement in the Eloor-Edayar region embodies a variant of 'empty belly'[14] environmentalism, obliged to confront the burdens of industrial pollution with limited resource infrastructure.

Detailed ethnographic profiling of the experiences of green events suggests that the people who mobilise and lead the local environmental struggles all come from working-class backgrounds. Apart from inland fish workers and farmworkers during the initial phase of the movement, most participants engage in daily wage labour or contract labour in factories, rendering them precarious and vulnerable in terms of having a steady flow of income and benefits. Considering the lack of a secure job and benefits, engaging in environmental activism often puts these workers in strained circumstances as they scramble to balance mobilising funds for protests with meeting household expenditure. In explaining the financial difficulties that the members face, Ibrahim, a founding member of the green movement, remarked:

> None of us have permanent jobs. I mean, earlier, we did not consider anything but worked for this movement. To be honest, we did not provide well for our families …we were all invested in this movement. That was full-time activism. But today that's not the case. I had recently taken out a loan to build my house. I defaulted on the loan, and right now we are on the verge of eviction. I couldn't repay the loan; I had no means. I tried to sell this in between. So that's my situation. Kumar's situation is no different. His wife works and that's how he managed, and now he has also started taking up small projects. Each one of us goes through such struggles. So we cannot continue many activities under such circumstances … not just that, we are involved with many other movements and activities. (Ibrahim, a founding member of PMVS, personal interview, 20 July 2018)

The financial instability and precarity of the green actors also emerged during interviews with trade union members. According to James, a union leader:

> They are all working-class people … people who thrive on daily wage or contract jobs. I would never say that they are rich, or even middle-class. These are people who struggle to eke out a living.

The working-class base of this green movement, along with the strong presence of unions affiliated to communist parties within the Standing Council, transforms the battles into a 'red-green conflict' as opposed to the more prominent label of 'blue-green conflicts'. In addition, the framing of environmental grievances by local green activists explicitly identifies it as a class issue. The deep commitment to the Marxian philosophy and idioms of class consciousness[15] is evident in campaign materials produced by the local environmental movement. Introducing a discussion forum on *Marxism, Environment, and Development*, Kumar explains the relevance of Marx in understanding the environmental crisis. He continues:

> The capitalist forces that plunder soil, water and all the natural resources to reap profits threaten the survival of human beings and our nature. The state, on the other hand, is invested in devising policies and programmes to facilitate the transfer of the title deeds for our natural resources to such capitalistic forces … Though such blatant conquests on nature or state-capital nexus were not prominent during the period in which Marx formulated his philosophy, Marx and Engels actively questioned the invasion of nature by human beings. Conceiving the class struggle as the conflicts between workers and the capitalists, or to believe that environmental conservation does not form part of the class struggle … such assumptions are only going to embolden and aid the capitalist forces. (Eloor 2008)

As well as establishing the enduring relevance of Marx's writings in understanding environmental issues, the excerpt identifies how the state facilitates the capitalist onslaught of nature by creating public policies to assist the capitalist project of appropriation. Kumar argues that the state hands over the ownership to natural resources to the forces of capitalism; it is consequently complicit in the resulting environmental damages produced in the profit-making process. More importantly, the narrative underscores the need to consider environmental grievances as a working-class struggle. The excerpt urges a movement away from reductive conceptions of class struggle as one that exists only between workers and capitalists. Kumar reaffirms how the environmental movement is

part of the class struggle, highlighting the intersection of environmental grievances and working-class issues. The excerpt clearly exposes the working-class origins and anti-capitalist orientations of the local environmental movement in the region.

Furthermore, the narratives constructed by the PMVS argue that attempts to negate the working-class roots of the environmental movement would only help the capitalists to create a schism between workers and environmental activists. Another pamphlet circulated by the PMVS in 2002 stated:

> Looking for differences between workers and the environmental activists or establishing them as separate groups only serves the interests of the capitalist. Workers become class conscious only when they start demanding the conservation of the environment and the community in which they live, in addition to standing for the protection of industries. That's their *douthyam* (mission). It's only then one becomes a class-conscious worker.

The excerpt clearly presents the green movement's interpretations of class and class-consciousness. An understanding of class struggle that transcends the realm of production and work to include environmental grievances. As the narrative declares, the mandate of class politics includes environmental conservation and the improvement of the community. A class-conscious worker, as per the campaign materials, would consider the health of workers and the environment to be equally or more important than protection of the industries. This depicts a broader definition of class guiding the actions of the green movement – one that moves beyond the boundaries of work, production and the economy. When asked about the presence of the working class on either side of this conflict, Kumar responded:

> What is the working-class? Who is the worker? There is a certain definition. They [trade unions] are seeing things outside of this definition now. Everyone who toils is a worker. Anyone who sells his labour power is a worker.

Kumar's words indicate broader definitions of 'work' and 'worker' that reach beyond the shop floor of a factory. Such terminology can largely be attributed to the long association of the members of PMVS[16] to the communist movement, the Communist Party, the progressive collective Kerala Sastra Sahithya Parishad (KSSP), which seeks to spread scientific

knowledge and awareness in the region, and other affiliations to left-wing political movements in the state.

By combining environmental protection with livelihood issues, the green movement reaffirms the working-class roots of local environmental politics. Consequently, in a development that links it with the environmental justice movement in the US and indigenous environmental movements across the world, this local movement in Kerala breaks away from the dominant categorisation of environmentalism as a middle-class phenomenon. Rather, it resembles the features attributed to environmental movements organised in the Global South that combine material and environmental grievances. Fitting Martinez-Alier's description of 'environmentalism of the poor', the local environmental movement in the Eloor-Edayar region is a fight against the loss of livelihoods, thus a genuine struggle for individual survival. The social base of the movement and the collective action frames make this a movement organised by and for working-class members.

The presence of movements that use frames of class politics on either side of the conflict thus complicates the existing explanation for this – no longer is it a conflict between two competing class interests or cultures. Moreover, it challenges the unitary conceptions of class interests, as the workers here clearly have differential economic interests as far as pollution regulation is concerned. These complexities hint at the need to move beyond dichotomous, class-based explanations to understand the tensions between labour and green movements. This is primarily accomplished by problematising the reductive attribution of generalised economic interests to classes.

Fighting in the name of workers

One of the interesting aspects of the conflicts is that both movements invoke the interests of workers to legitimise their goals and tactics. According to the collective action frames and narratives of frontline leaders, the conflict between labour and environmental movements is one 'for and among' workers who hold opposing interests. The thematic analysis below explains how green activists interpret the issue of pollution by focusing on its negative implications to the livelihoods of resource-dependent workers, for example the inland fish workers and the farmworkers. The trade unions, by contrast, focus on the income and job security of the factory workers. This section therefore highlights the heterogeneity of 'workers' interest' emergent from the interview

narratives of union and green movement members. The aim here is to uncloak the diversity of 'working-class' interests and their interpretations, and to use what is revealed to explain the opposition between unions and green movements. In doing so, this section explicates how sectoral location, dependence on natural resources and vulnerability to environmental damages produce distinctly different interests and outcomes for 'workers'.

In the name of fisherfolk and farmworkers

According to the greens, the fight against pollution is also a fight to secure the livelihoods of the inland fisherfolk and the farmworkers (who cultivate the unique rice variety called *Pokkali*)[17]. The informal, resource-dependent nature of these forms of work makes them more vulnerable to the negative fallouts of industrial pollution. Furthermore, the framing adopted by the green movement enhances the need to incorporate fisherfolk and farm workers into the category of 'working class'. For example, relying on Marxian terminology, the excerpt below carefully connects how the dwindling supplies of fish prevent the inland fisherfolk from earning their daily living in this way:

> The present circumstances prevent these workers from selling their labour power. A fish worker going to the river to catch fish is returning barehanded. He is not getting enough fish to catch … If you go to the harbour area, you can see most of the boats returning empty-handed. The situation is pretty much the same for inland fish workers. Pollution has brought us here … It has also adversely affected organic agriculture and aquaculture. Pollution has severely affected *Pokkali* culture [a unique, saline-tolerant rice variety that is cultivated using extensive aquaculture in an organic way]. They cultivate *Pokkali* with *chemmeen* [prawn infiltration] in six-month intervals. The intrusion of chemical contaminants prevents these agrarian rice varieties from growing to their full potential. (Abdu, member of PMVS, personal interview, 30 May 2018)

The excerpt highlights how pollution of the river threatens the livelihoods of fish workers and farmworkers, both of whom eke out their living from the availability of natural resources. It tactfully links the deterioration of the conditions of production, in this context the river, to the loss of livelihoods for workers reliant on common pool natural resources.

Highlighting the plight of the River Periyar, which plays an important role in enabling resource-based workers to catch fish for the market, exposes the complexities of dichotomous or polarised understandings surrounding class that divide people into proletariat or bourgeoisie. That is, fisherfolk in Kerala constitute one of the outliers to the Kerala model (Kurien 1995) characterised by social, economic and ecological marginalisation from the achievements in 'development' lauded within the mainstream. Classifying a socially marginalised community such as the artisanal fisherfolk into petty bourgeoisie in terms of their ownership of means of production (country boat or fishing nets) lays bare the issues of deterministic definitions surrounding class or of who constitutes the working-class.

That is where definitions that underscore the location vis-à-vis capitalist exploitation come to the forefront. Approaches that foreground the adverse effects of capitalism on the environment, and show how that accentuates existing social systems of stratification (Pellow 2000; Newell 2005), aid in understanding the fragmented working-class presence and interests in various sectors of the economy, both formal and informal.

It would be a stretch even from a strict liberal economic standpoint to argue that the vast majority of informal workers in India are not part of the traditional working class because they are self-employed, engage in daily-wage labour or are sub-contracted by organised firms. For the green movement, apart from the everyday disruptions from pollution, the loss of livelihoods for fisherfolk served as an important reason to take up action. Reflecting upon the origins of an organised movement against industrial pollution, Muneer, a local environmentalist, reminisced about his encounter with a local fish vendor. He describes how that motivated him to organise collective action:

> So one day as we were standing here and chatting by the side of this village road right in front of Abdu's home, a woman in our neighborhood walked past us … She used to sell fish to make a living and carried her woven basket on top of her head … she walked back to us and said the supply of fish is really low in the market. She said the supply is low because of the 'company water'. 'Company water', that's what we used to call the toxic effluents from industry. And that struck me. (Muneer, member of PMVS, personal interview, 13 May 2018)

This brief interaction, according to Ibrahim, helped him to recognise the adverse effects of pollution on people's livelihoods. The workers who

lost their daily catchment were among the initial victims of industrial pollution. Though the direct effects of pollution, such as severe ambient pollution and chronic health effects, were to become more prominent in later years, the rapidly dwindling supply of fish sent out clear warning signals. During the initial phase of the anti-pollution campaign, the increased vulnerability experienced by these workers was crucial in motivating them to join events organised by the movement. In reconstructing the emergence of the movement, Abdu recalled its strong support base among the inland fish workers:

> The majority of participants in our first protest were fish workers. Fishermen from Varappuzha, Kadamakkudy, from all these regions … they need no convincing of the issue, you know … They were struggling with it and were looking out for options … openings, to express their dissent … and perhaps, a leadership to fight against this. (Abdu, member of PMVS, personal interview, 30 May 2018)

As the excerpt points out, the fish workers were aggrieved by the fallouts of pollution. It thus required little effort on the part of the green activists to recruit and mobilise them into the movement against pollution. The first protest organised by the PMVS was also an ode to the struggles of the fish workers; participants formed a human chain by standing on an array of fishing boats parked across the River Periyar. (This protest event is discussed in detail in Chapter 3.) The protest orchestrated across the River Periyar was also a display of the widespread support received by the anti-pollution movement. It powerfully illustrated the pivotal role of fish workers among the disaffected people.

The narratives of green activists also attempt to bust the claims surrounding 'job losses' as a myth. Comparing the number of fish workers and factory workers, the greens argue that the loss of livelihoods from continued pollution is far higher than the number of jobs lost from the closure of polluting factories. The excerpt also questions the dominant model of development, in which the mainstream logic would associate 'job' only with employment opportunities in the organised sector. Explaining how these 'jobs', the livelihoods of fish workers, are available with zero investment, the excerpt below highlights the importance of preserving them. Contrasting the number of factory workers to local people who make a living from the River Periyar, Martin remarked:

> I mean, all these reveal the failure associated with development as a concept, that we have tried implementing. I mean, a river is

> a place where many thousands of people are engaging in work with zero investment. We might have to spend 1,000–2,000 crores to produce 100 job opportunities, but here you don't even spend 100 paisa [the lowest denomination of Indian currency]. In one of the studies we had conducted, we found 22,000 inland fish workers; this is in comparison to the 8,800 workers in the industries operating in Eloor. Such comparisons could vary in terms of value addition or contribution to GDP, but even so the difference in numbers is stark. But still, the primary productive side of our society includes agriculture and fishing. The present model of development is eliminating these two sectors of primary production, and that's when things become problematic. (Martin, member of PMVS, personal interview, 9 July 2018)

Using the economic rationales of costs and benefits, Kumar carefully reveals how the conversations about securing jobs are always skewed in favour of organised factory employment. The excerpt points out how pollution jeopardises the lives and livelihoods of more than 22,000 inland fish workers – livelihoods that do not require huge capital investments or infrastructure. He presents this number against the 8,800 factory workers' jobs, and the 1,000–2,000 crores spent in creating them, to show the stark differentials in the number of workers in each of these sectors.

The excerpt poignantly exposes how the model of modern development conceives progress in a scheme of valuation that prioritises the secondary sector over the primary sector. In other words, despite the actual numbers of people employed, the industry is considered desirable because progress, defined in the modern economic sense, would entail the transition of an economy from primary (agriculture) to secondary (industry). According to local environmentalists, the models of development that promote industry and ignore agriculture and allied activities are inherently responsible for the ongoing pollution in the Eloor-Edayar industrial belt. The attribution of blame transcends the level of individuals and organisations when the politics of modern development is itself held responsible for negative environmental burdens.

Unions and the interests of factory workers

Focusing on the grievances of workers employed in the industries, trade unions argue that any measure to regulate pollution will adversely affect factory workers' jobs and income. According to the union leaders, the

collective action against pollution organised by the local environmental movement damages the factory workers' economic interests, as well as the political economy of industrial development. In Padmanabhan's words, 'An industry closing down would first affect its workers'. Often they used stories of industrial closures to embellish the effects of environmental activism on factory workers. Expressing anguish over an industry ordered to stop operation due to non-compliance to pollution regulation, Kabeer, another trade union leader, remarked:

> A set of so-called environmentalists have taken a stand to stop the operation of even the industries that comply with all the guidelines put forward by the PCB and they manage to use such pseudo-activism in the name of the environment. The most recent victim of such activism was Sree Sakthi Paper Mills … So what outcome did this action produce? The company is closed, all its machinery left to rusting and more than 700 workers … the factory workers, that includes allied and contract workers, lost their jobs. An enterprise has disappeared altogether. But if these people, these pseudo-environmentalists, had approached this issue with some equivalence, then this wouldn't have happened … that enterprise would have continued to operate … more than 700 families would have survived. (Kabeer, a union leader and member of the CPIM, personal interview, 3 July 2018)

This excerpt highlights how unions portray workers of closed industrial units as victims of local environmentalism. By focusing on the plight of 700 workers and their families, Kabeer explicates the issue of job loss associated with closing non-compliant industries. The excerpt even argues that the industry was compliant and did follow the guidelines issued by the PCB, attributing the closure solely to the pseudo-activism of environmentalists. Citing the story of Sree Sakthi Paper Mills, the narrative illustrates the resentment against the closure through the images of 'rusting' machinery as a sign of an enterprise disappearing altogether. The excerpt clearly uncovers the diagnostic frames of the unions that pin the blame for job loss on pseudo-environmentalism. In other words, the unions legitimise their resentment against greens, citing the interests of factory workers.

Throughout the interviews union members reaffirmed the centrality of factory workers and industries to the larger economy. The frames and interpretations of the union leaders omitted the grievances of other workers, such as inland fish workers and farmworkers. When asked

about the presence of working-class or workers on either side of these conflicts, Padmanabhan, a union leader who is also a member of the Communist Party, tried to put things into perspective:

> In India, the majority of workers are in the unorganised sector. The economy is not run by a few industries on the banks of the river, but the economy is run by the innumerable number of workers who work and later spend their wages in the market, thereby creating demand for products … The market moves as the purchasing power of the people changes. See, if the workers get no bonus or salary, then that will get reflected in the market. So this affects all the workers who make a living from the river such as the fish workers … even the fish workers who catch fish from the river sell this fish to the families of the industrial worker … so that's a symbiotic relationship. So the labour of the factory workers also affects other workers who largely remain in the unorganised sector. It affects all. So to preserve the means of livelihood for all these workers … we need to secure the industries … the river and the environment in which the industry operates … it is a joint responsibility of all these people. We need to move in that direction. (Padmanabhan, union leader and the Convener of SCTU, 21 May 2018)

The excerpt succinctly presents the trade union's argument about taking the side of industrial workers. Even though it starts with reaffirming the importance of unorganised workers, the narrative soon shifts to expounding the importance of factory workers for other workers and the rest of the economy. As explained, despite causing pollution, industrial production is rationalised by unions using the interest of factory workers.

Yet since their livelihoods are directly reliant on the access and availability of clean natural resources, a polluted river hurts the livelihoods of inland fisherfolk and farmworkers. However, these grievances do not become the mandate of the trade unions, hinting at their organisational standpoint that represents only the interests of 'members'. The bounded and interest-based intervention of unions is exemplified by the union's reference to factory workers as the primary victims of both industrial pollution and pollution mitigation measures.

Significantly, the narrative underlines the centrality of industries and factory workers in the creation of market demand. Explaining how the wages of factory workers create demand for the product of the fish workers and thereby get pumped back into the economy, the

excerpt strives to emphasise the symbiotic nature of their interests and relations. In doing so, the excerpt reiterates the nature of postcolonial capitalist economy, characterised by the 'capital-non-capital complex' (Sanyal 2007). Furthermore, the politics of trade unions in the region fits the global model in which unions have given up on organising the unorganised workers as the costs exceeded the benefits (Yates 2018; Gorz 1980, 1968; Tronti 2019 [1966]).

This is further augmented by trade unions' approach towards migrant workers who work in the industrial hub. Leaders are swift to cover up and side with industries during instances of accidental deaths or occupational hazards suffered by non-Malayalee workers inside the factories,[18] thus declaring their solidarity or lack thereof. The moniker 'guest workers',[19] a recent update made by the state as a gesture of inclusion and recognition of migrant workers in Kerala, remains largely academic when it comes to their inclusion into trade unions.

Challenging the dominant and traditional Marxist interpretations of the working class as a uniform category, the narratives hint at the multitude of interests prevalent within this class. Moreover, they highlight the importance of integrating the informal sector and unorganised workers into the discussions of postcolonial capitalist development in India. Going beyond the polarised view of capitalist society, Indian social reality demands the recognition of how the informal economy facilitates capitalist accumulation while occupying spaces created by the market (Sanyal 2007).

Understanding the compromise between labour and capital

Trade unions' alignment and representation of the interests of factory workers, as explored in the previous section, should also be considered in the wider context of the transformation that unions have undergone during the neoliberal era. In other words, the framings form part of a broader shift in trade union politics that has moved away from the goal of overthrowing capitalist production to one in which it institutionalises grievances and enters a compromise with capital. Such a change is animated by the changing perception of union leaders on the role of capitalist production, accumulation and the local environment.

Contrary to green activists' interpretation of capitalism and the environment, trade union frames strive to depict pollution as a latent consequence of industrial development. Using the perspectives of union

leaders, the following section deciphers this movement away from a politics of class struggle towards one of class compromise between labour and capital. The dominant themes of these narratives include 1) establishing the desirability of capital accumulation and profits for promoting the interests of workers, 2) 'doing facework' for the state in order to revamp its 'tainted' image as a location hostile to capital due to its militant trade unions and 3) 'manufacturing consent' in favour of capitalism by defending capitalist production and rendering pollution as a latent, largely unavoidable consequence. The frames presented below illustrate how the transition in labour politics experienced in the state has played a significant role in creating the rift between trade unions and green movements in Kerala.

'Capital is good': manufacturing consent for industrial capitalism

The shift in Kerala's labour politics becomes explicit in the narratives of trade union leaders and other representatives. The transformation in frames is more apparent and noteworthy when analysed against the backdrop of the umpteen anti-capitalist frames used by the communist movement in the state, including 'Let capitalism be doomed' (*Muthalalitham Thulayatte*). The unions consider natural resources as natural capital, able to play a crucial role in furthering the country's economic growth. In discussing the issue of mineral sand mining Raheem, a local trade union leader, explained his dissatisfaction with protests against extractive sand mining in Kerala:

> Across the world, people are using mineral beach sand to extract the minerals and byproducts to foster their economies; some people in Kerala are dead against such a move. Let me ask one thing. The Arabian countries which once struggled with poverty rose to economic prosperity with the discovery of crude oil or that of gold. If people there had obstructed the mining of crude oil, gold or coal, would they be enjoying the economic prosperity they have now? We should understand that despite having a material that is more valuable than gold or crude oil along the shores of our state, we are unable to make use of that and transform our economy only because of these fake or pseudo-environmentalists. We are a state that continues to rely on remittances from the Gulf. (Raheem, union leader, personal interview, 23 May 2018)

The excerpt clearly explains how the unions equate natural resources with capital that can lead the state to economic prosperity. Elucidating examples of Arabian (Middle Eastern) countries that have used their natural resources to achieve economic growth, the narrative suggests how the state should exploit its resources as a vehicle to prosperity. Union leaders also promote industries as the only resolution to solve the financial crisis in the face of an economic downturn, resulting in reduced remittances. Proposing industrialisation as the way out, Raheem continued,

> The state will be facing a financial crisis if the remittances start to dwindle. So naturally, without having more industries, we won't be able to accommodate Gulf returnees or the younger generation of our state that is entering the job market.

The analysis uncovers that the conflicts are not based solely on economic interests; rather, they are ideological. The following interview illustrates how unions reproduce and defend the ideology of capitalism. During the interview Basheer, a union leader, clearly expressed unions' stand on capitalism and the desirability of increased capitalist accumulation in Kerala. Explaining the shift in politics, Basheer opined:

> There is nothing wrong with the institutionalised and systematic accumulation of capital. See, Kerala is a region where the organised trade union is very strong … it also happens to be a place where communist and left values receive acceptance … 'investors will not come in such contexts', this is a remark often made against our state. The organised trade union movement in this state has a responsibility to answer this question … because they are shouldering an unnecessary blame … We need to make more wealth by increasing the production efficiency and better wage earnings … This can be done by reducing the per head costs … but in doing so we are not willing to compromise on reductions in wages or bonus. (Basheer, union leader, personal interview, 20 June 2018)

Capitalism brings forth the unions it needs, opines Michael D. Yates in his 2018 book *Can the Working Class Change the World?*. Such a view resonates well with the critics of socialist reforms and formalisation and institutionalisation of labour organisations that emerged since the 1960s (Tronti 2019 [1966]; Gorz 1968; Offe 1985; Yates 2018). As explicated by the excerpt, the organised trade union movement in Kerala

is determined to repair the tainted image of the state, 'as a location where capital flees fearing militant trade unionism'.

This commitment to losing the 'investment-unfriendly' tag and rebuilding Kerala's image as an investment-friendly location dominates trade union narratives. Since the 'militant trade union' movement of the state received the most criticism for this negative image, the unions are working hard not to shoulder the 'unnecessary blame' in the state's development trajectory. However, the union leader was quick to dismiss any interpretations of this 'class compromise' as a form of surrender or submission before capitalist forces. Instead, he explained a friendlier relationship as part of an effort to rebuild the image of the state as an 'investment-friendly' location. Such narratives also uncovered the facework undertaken by the unions as they sought to depict Kerala as a state that welcomed capital accumulation. Saleel, a CITU leader, explained:

> No union organisation has surrendered or submitted before the capitalists … We are just trying to remove this negative tag attached to our state, which says that we are not an investor-friendly state only because we have a left-wing government … We are trying to respond to this baseless attack. This tag is also leading to the slowdown of development in our state … We are trying our best to get this state on the development trajectory and to make the benefits of modern capitalist technology and capitalist advancements in production and distribution available to the people of Kerala … That is our responsibility … This is the responsibility of the trade unions, the Communist Party and its leadership and the leftwing government of our state. We need to end this mischaracterisation. (Saleel, union leader, personal interview, 12 May 2018)

In portraying their compromise with capital as neither an act of surrender nor submission, the narratives explain how this shift in politics seeks to establish the benefits of capitalist advancements in production and distribution in mainstream society. In a way, such attempts to produce ideas in favour of capitalism are interesting, especially considering the history of anti-capitalist struggles. 'Using the snake to take the venom off!' goes a local adage, essentially meaning attempts to resolve an issue using the thing that caused the problem in the first place. This appears to be what the industries are doing as they deploy trade unions to manufacture consent in favour of capitalist accumulation in Kerala. In other words, the unions engage in producing frames that legitimise the ideology

of capitalism. This, in turn, directs workers to support a system that exploits their labour power.

Unions argue that to perceive Kerala as a location hostile to capital is a 'mischaracterisation'; it is the responsibility of the unions, the Communist Party and the left-wing government to end such inaccurate representations. According to the excerpts, the efforts undertaken by unions to transform the image of Kerala as an investment-friendly location are also redemptive, considering how the negative image was often attributed to the 'militant trade union politics'. The narratives illustrate the need for facework and focus on the unions' onus in accomplishing this through their unconditional support of investments.

> We are not compromising with the primitive accumulation strategies deployed by capital. No compromise. Make profits without exploiting the workers. Naturally, there will be profits and more capital because of the investment, without which there won't be any private investment. But then more people should get jobs with better wages ... for that the way in which we organise the system of production and production relations must change. (Mathew, union leader, 29 May 2018)

Moving a step closer to the global economic order, members of the unions identified the need for greater privatisation in the industrial sector. The advocacy for private industries complicates the stand against privatisation declared by left-wing parties. Yet it is interesting to note that the strong support for privatisation and defence for the interests of private industries come from unions affiliated to the left-wing parties of CPI and CPM. The articles printed in the newsletter of the Standing Council were replete with calls to defend the interests of PML – a private company that occupies the top spot of polluters as per the civil society groups and that seeks to find a segue to enter the state's mineral sand mining sector. Advocating for privatisation, one union spokesperson established the case for a larger private sector in extractive mining as follows:

> People are smuggling this sand outside of our state. If not smugglers, the next tide and winds will take this soil to the shores of Sri Lanka. The sea will wash it away. Don't we want to utilise this? There is so much deposit that it can feed generations, you know. We will get so much money, but we are not using it. As a policy, the left front also is hesitant to give mining rights to the private sector. But such rights are given to the private sector in all other states. If we refuse to give

> mining rights to the private sector in Kerala, we will become idiots in the eyes of society. The private sector is making a very big contribution to Kerala's development. (Basheer, union leader, personal interview, 20 June 2018)

This 'privatisation is good' argument is more problematic when you bear in mind the long-standing grassroots resistance against mineral sand mining in the state, led by inhabitants of villages dilapidated by extractive mining operations. The union leader comes across as a spokesperson for private industries – not just for the companies in which they are employed, but also for other opportunities for extraction and accumulation. The statement also appears ironic considering that it was made by a trade union leader belonging to the political left – a political sphere that has declared its opposition to privatisation associated with the neoliberal economic order. These excerpts reveal how the rhetoric and ideology of left-wing politics in the state are shifting to embrace privatisation, one of the pivotal goals of neoliberal capitalism.

By advocating for the privatisation of natural resource extraction, trade unions openly declare their allegiance to a capitalist model of accumulation and economic growth – one that prioritises the private ownership of property, resources and capital. However, this should not come as a surprise. It fits the global trend of union politics, particularly after the Second World War, when unions became bureaucratised. Corruption ensued, bringing unions into an accord with capital that was discarded as capital embraced neoliberalism (Yates 2018).

Destruction of nature as a latent consequence of industrial development

Trade unions, particularly those affiliated to the left-wing parties, engage in the active process of manufacturing consent in favour of industrial development; in doing so, attempt to downplay the adverse effects of industrial pollution. One of the prominent strategies used to defend the industrial capitalist system of production is to brush aside industrial pollution as an inevitable outcome – one that is insignificant when compared to development's promise of economic growth and material comfort. Accepting the exploitative effects of capitalist production and accumulation on the environment, union leaders interpreted this as an inevitable or latent consequence of development and progress. Mathew, a representative of the AITUC, explained:

> The mindless exploitation and accumulation of profits under a capitalist system might lead to environmental issues. It can lead to large-scale exploitation of nature. But can we say that industries should not use water because they exploit the environment? We now know how to generate electricity from water, but should we learn to live in the darkness and not produce electricity from water? That does not make sense. Shouldn't we make use of nature to build comfort for humanity? (Mathew, union leader, personal interview, 8 June 2018)

Even when the narrative recognises the negative effects of capitalist production on nature, the excerpt indicates how impossible it is to engage in production without altering nature. Using water as an example, the excerpt illustrates the complexity of choosing between material 'comfort' in the form of electricity or industrial products and environmental conservation. The excerpt exemplifies how the unions recognise the impasse between capitalism and the environment, but continue to justify environmental damage in the name of material comfort. This often turned into a complicated exercise because the unions must modify their declared commitment to anti-capitalist ideology in order to gain legitimacy for industries operating along the banks of the River Periyar.

> New industries are inevitable to offer gainful employment to such a pool of workers. Derailing the growth of industries in the name of environment … environment is important, of course, we certainly must preserve Kerala's rivers, and Kerala's paddy fields … but to dismantle industries in the name of environment will do little good for industrial development. (Kabeer union leader, personal interview, 3 July 2018)

In other words, although pollution is deleterious to nature it is still worthwhile considering the positive outcomes from production, particularly in the form of material comfort, as far as unions are concerned. When asked if the unions perceive the movement organised by the greens as a specific fight against the capitalist system of production and its fallouts on the environment, Ramachandran, a union leader, remarked:

> See, environmental degradation can happen even in a socialist production system … there will obviously be environmental issues

> and other issues related to pollution. No system of social organisation can survive without an economic system that generates wealth. The production of wealth basically entails three components – labour, basic infrastructure and capital … we call an economic system capitalist when these three components are privately owned. The transition to socialism happens after altering the relations of production … In a socialist system you can distribute the economic wealth without exploitation … because the working-class has risen to power here. Understand? (Ramachandran, trade union leader, personal interview, 3 July 2018)

It is interesting to notice how the excerpt seeks to defend capitalism using the environmental excesses caused by socialist production systems. The emergent themes from these narratives reaffirm the importance of generating wealth in an economic system. According to the excerpts, the creation of economic wealth is inherent for the survival of socialism and capitalism; it is about the distributional aspects of this wealth that these two systems differ as per the unions.

The narratives underscore the views presented by K.S., a noted environmentalist, on how the economic system envisioned by these left-leaning trade union leaders bears striking similarities to the capitalist economic system and the idea of economic growth. Elucidating the 'failure' of the left-wing movement in Kerala, K.S. explained how much of this can be attributed to the movement's inability to envision an alternative economic system. While discussing Anthony C. Sutton's (1974) seminal book *Wallstreet, and the Bolshevik Revolution*, K.S. compared the current economic model in Kerala to that of a capitalist economy:

> No revolutionary government could bring about significant changes to the economy … you know, they failed in constructing an alternative economy. Despite minor changes at the distribution front, the economy in spirit remains the same. I am not saying that this is unimportant … I am all for dreams … We did have some dreams and we did make strides in the distribution front, but other than that the structure of our economy remains the same (capitalist) despite the claims of communist spirits. Regarding aspects of resource usage, or material aspects of development, consumerism, etc. our model is not very different from the other model [the capitalist model]. (K.S., environmentalist, personal interview, 8 July 2018)

The narratives from trade union members corroborate K.S.'s observations about the capitalist orientations of Kerala's economy. Despite assuming the image of a communist society and reporting lower rates of economic growth, one of the dominant characteristics of the state's economic behaviour was a conspicuous model of consumption financed by remittances (Kurien 1994; Osella and Osella 1999; Osella and Osella 2000). Studies that shed light on Malayali's consumption pattern establish the affinity for material comforts and highlight the underlying inequality along axes of caste and class. This affinity for economic progress defined in terms of material assets and infrastructure stands out in the narratives of trade union representatives as they discussed the shift in labour politics in Kerala – a movement away from the politics of 'class-struggle' towards a state of 'class-compromise'.

According to Heller (1999), this class compromise has enabled Kerala's transition into social-democratic capitalism. The discussions surrounding industries and the need for greater investments confirm Heller's observations about the shift in class politics that has occurred. However, the effect of this shift in deepening the democratic process is challenged here by uncovering how such a nexus between labour and capital works together to repress and demobilise movements seeking to challenge the adverse effects of capitalist development in Kerala.

The excerpts highlight how trade union leaders, who represent unions affiliated to communist parties (CPI and CPIM), interpret capitalist accumulation, profits and economic growth as desirable and necessary for the advancement of workers' interests and the larger society. Such a position, when evaluated against the professed anti-capitalist ideology of the communist movement in the state, presents an irony where the leaders engage in an active defence and facework to attract capitalist accumulation. Furthermore, this shift in politics also explains the ongoing rift between labour and green movements despite the working-class orientations of both. The excerpts above depict how the ideological orientations of trade unions have moved away from Marxian ideology to embrace the 'benefits' of capitalism and profits. I argue that this shift in politics has long-standing consequences to the environment in the state; it plays a decisive role in shaping the nature of the relationship between unions and other progressive social and environmental movements. In the case of Eloor, the trade unions transformed orientations in favour of capital feed into the ongoing schism between unions and greens.

The interpretation of class and class solidarity for the unions is now confined to the sector and is deeply ingrained in the prospects

of the economy. Guided by renewed politics, unions interpret greater accumulation and profits as desirable for the workers because it will fetch them higher wages and benefits. However, what remains out of this equation is the interests of many thousands of workers who eke out a living outside the factory shop floor. In that sense the union frames are narrow and confined, appearing to consider only the interests of workers employed in the industrial sector. This presents a very narrow viewpoint of 'work', 'worker' and 'class solidarity', where all these words operate as a unifying factor within the bounds of the sector or within the boundaries of capitalism. This is not a tendency limited to the unions, however; it transcends to the larger society and political parties. It is certainly revealing about the changing political landscape in the state, where the political left alienates progressive social movements in fighting capitalism.

Many shades of red?

Greens call out the 'class compromise' between labour and capital, and the ways in which that destabilises the idea of a universal working class as ingrained in the writings of Marx and Engels. They argue that the lack of co-operation between the different types of workers clearly indicates how ideas of class consciousness and solidarity have proved to be a myth in this context. For example, Maqbool elaborates the demise of a universal idea of 'working class' as follows:

> Even when we say that we are all working-class … in a broad-sense … it is still a matter of perspective … For a trade union operating in an industrial area, workers include only 'factory workers' … an industry, barely supporting 1,000 workers, is destroying the livelihoods of tens and thousands of inland fish workers who eke out a living from the river … even there these trade unions have formed unions … but they seldom link these union activities. Unions here will cater to the interests of factory workers and unions there will serve the interests of fish workers … that's the arrangement. I mean, they don't bother to form an alliance between these two unions that operate within the same party even. They are purely issue-based … the idea of a universal working class is a myth … you can say 'workers of the world' and all that, but it's just compartmentalised. (Maqbool, member of PMVS, personal interview, 18 June 2018)

A recurrent theme among the interviews with the environmentalist was this demise of class solidarity in the traditional sense. The green activists elaborated on how this idea of solidarity among pure class lines is a myth, highlighting the lack of coalition even among trade unions working for different categories or types of workers. As the excerpt points out, even the branches of the same union working among factory workers and fish workers failed to collaborate and find amicable solutions that would ameliorate the issues faced by both categories of workers. The interviews with environmentalists highlighted the narrow and issue-based nature of trade union politics – an arena that completely fails to consider 'working class' as a broad category comprising all toiling workers.

Invoking the broad-based call in the Manifesto of the Communist Party to unify the 'workers of the world', the environmentalists point out how trade union leaders, even those belonging to the political left, parochially interpret and operate on 'working class' as a sectoral identity and category. Commenting on the lack of a broad-based conception of the rights of workers and working-class solidarity,[20] Ibrahim noted:

> See, if this is just about protecting the rights of workers, then there should only be one union for all the workers … but in reality, such labour activism is issue-based, work-based and sometimes place-based. See, that's why a factory worker releases pollutants into the river … without such sectoral affiliations, a worker cannot put pollutants in the river when he thinks about the inland fish workers who are members of the same union. (Ibrahim, a founding member of PMVS, personal interview, 20 July 2018)

In addition, the interviews also explored how the communist reality in Kerala has drifted away from the approach foregrounded in the Manifesto (Marx and Engels [1848] 1967), a vision that conceived all workers as equal and desires unification among the working class. Exploring the issue-based, work-based and place-based politics of trade unions, the interviews expound how far reality has broken away from the ideal model of class consciousness and solidarity along class lines. The narrow or exclusive interpretations of 'working class' that confine it to sectoral boundaries enable factory workers to defend and legitimise the act of releasing pollutants into the river, even when such an act derails the livelihoods of fellow workers (fish workers and farmworkers).

In other words, the absence of class solidarity is apparent when the factory workers join the industries in polluting the environment, the primary source of sustenance for many other workers. Thus the green

activists who have declared affiliations to the Communist Party and the Marxian ideology argued that the idea of universal working class is a myth in the context of Kerala's trade union politics. Another member of the local environmental movement alluded to the divisive nature of unions even in the context of factory workers:

> Even when you say that the unions are for all factory workers, there are clear divisions within right … a union at FACT would also represent the interest of FACT workers. If there happens to be a conflict of interest between Merchum and HIL … then the respective unions will fight to protect the workers in each of these industries … I mean you can think of a broad alliance among all the working class, but that's just in definitions … in practice, such alliances seldom happen, even within the same category of workers. (Zacharia, member of *Janajagratha*, personal interview, 7 July 2018)

The parochial and sectoral orientation of unions in defining and protecting workers' rights is further embellished in the territorial definition of workers' rights within industries. The environmentalists pointed out that a trade union at FACT would not bother to fight for the right of fellow factory workers employed in a different industry. Despite the failure to achieve class alliance between sectors, the examples presented in the narrative above suggest the lack of a sense of solidarity, even within the same sector. In sum, the definition and enforcement of workers' rights are often contingent upon the sectoral location (primary/secondary), resource dependence and even the exact industry in which the workers are employed; they thereby challenge the idea of a universal working class and class solidarity. More importantly, the discussions about the failure of trade unions affiliated with the political left to operate with a broader definition of working class lead to questions about the ongoing definitions and interpretations of communism and left politics in Kerala.

Discussion

This chapter seeks to explain the conflicts between trade unions and the environmental movements in the Eloor-Edayar industrial region, despite both belonging to similar class backgrounds. Highlighting the heterogeneity of working-class interests, the chapter examines why the attribution of generalised interests and politics over working-class

groups is problematic; the interests of different workers are often contingent upon both the sector in which they are employed and the resource dependency of such vocations. In considering this, I also reveal the divergent conceptions of class that underlie the trade unions and green movements. Distinguishing between an inclusive and exclusive conception of the working class, this chapter uncovers the differential interpretations of class, class consciousness and solidarity within these two movement groups. In addition, this chapter demonstrates how the class compromise between labour and capital plays a huge role in accentuating the conflicts between labour and green movements. In other words it exposes the 'illusion of homogeneity' attributed to left-wing politics in the context of Kerala.

The interests of the organised unions are influenced by their embeddedness in the industrial capitalist system of production, where their survival and economic security are contingent upon profits. Their economic interests are strictly intertwined with their jobs, the security of which is contingent upon the progress and growth of the industrial sector. Unions consider pollution to be an inevitable outcome of production, being more concerned about the potential loss of income from industrial closures than the damage inflicted on nature. In contrast, the inland fish workers and *Pokkali* farmers are adversely affected by the rampant pollution, their means of livelihood being directly threatened by the mounting levels of toxins in the River Periyar. Despite belonging to the generalised category of workers, they hold opposing interests as far as the issue of pollution control is concerned.

Such a situation is greatly influenced by the extent to which their economic interests and livelihoods are dependent on the availability of clean natural resources. A polluted (River) Periyar derails the livelihoods of inland fish workers by affecting the supply of fish; it also harms *Pokkali* farming. Furthermore, the analysis sheds light on the class compromise between the unions and the industrial capitalists, in which the former take up the ideological work to manufacture consent in favour of industrial capitalism.

In addition to the diversity of interests among workers, the analysis also sheds light on the inclusive vs. exclusive definition of class. Even though the members of the green movement are not directly engaging in fishing or farming, they are also working-class individuals who make a living from doing contractual and daily wage employment. As the analysis has exposed, the green movement's ideology and philosophy are deeply ingrained in the sustainable use of resources; its activists are thus disturbed when local industries poison their immediate environment.

The local environmental politics explored here transcend the immediate realm of the individual to reach the issues of the community. Such an inclusivity is reflected in their goals that include the interests of the inland fish workers and farmworkers. In sum, the conception of 'working class' used by the unions is exclusive in that it is confined to individuals working in their own sector. The excerpts above showed how this exclusive concept often includes only organised workers who are members of the unions and pay a union fee. In contrast, the understanding of 'working class' for the green movement is much broader than that of the unions, as they consider all toiling people to be working class. Guided by this inclusive, intersectional definition and interpretation, the environmentalists represent the interests of migrant workers, inland fish workers, farmworkers, contractual workers and all other individuals in the region who are affected by the negative effects of industrial pollution.

The class compromise between labour and capital is apparent throughout this analysis, in which unions declare their allegiance to the logics of capitalism and actively engage in producing an ideological defence of capitalism. This further leads to the emergence of two variants of left-wing politics in Kerala: real leftists vs. leftists who support capitalism. As ironic as it might sound, the categories uncover the underlying contradiction in claiming affiliation to left politics without supporting grassroots mobilisations for social and environmental justice while at the same time aligning with industries. This chapter concludes that the class compromise between labour and capital has had profound consequences on unions' relationship with other social movements, particularly with environmental movements.

In addition, the compromise between labour and capital has transformed left-wing politics in the state by pushing the marginalised social groups and movements away from the centre of left politics. Membership in labour organisations has become a criterion for union intervention in the grievances of workers, and such sectoral/parochial politics have largely kept the migrant workers and their grievances outside the purview of labour politics in Kerala. Furthermore, the plethora of environmental justice movements in Kerala highlights the implications of this shift in politics on the environment. In sum, the drastic shift in left-wing politics in the state raises important questions about the decentralised model of democratisation in Kerala, as well as the need to question the Kerala model from the standpoints of social and environmental justice.

The last few chapters have discussed the influence of political-economic factors in influencing the relationship between labour and

environmental conflicts. The next chapter explores the conflicts between labour and green movements at an interpretive level. Delving deep into the ways in which the two movements construct competing for frames and interpretations surrounding the issue of pollution, Chapter 6 identifies the frame-disputes between the movements and explains how the dominant ideology of development manifests within them.

Notes

1 Originally named as the 'Rivers Should Flow' (*Ozhukanam Puzhakal*), this campaign was organised under the aegis of the River Research Centre (NGO) by the 'Friends of Latha' – a group formed to commemorate the late Dr Latha Anantha, a passionate environmentalist. The idea of the campaign, designed to span two months (22 January to 22 March 2019) was to 'increase public awareness of the importance of maintaining flow in rivers' by exploring the many ways in which the flow of rivers could be collectively revived.

2 I want to reiterate that the call to move beyond class here does not render class as an irrelevant aspect of social movement mobilisation, nor imply its complete dismissal. Instead it discusses the continued relevance of class while also problematising singular definitions and conceptualisations surrounding social class in contemporary times.

3 This is not to overlook the emergent literature on working-class environmentalism that explores the environmental struggles organised by working-class groups, including organised trade unions (Gordon 2004; Barca 2012; Vanchon and Brecher 2016). However, the intra class conflicts between environmental movements and trade unions are not a focus of these studies.

4 This is not to preclude the working-class origins of environmental justice movement in the US, nor of indigenous environmental movements across the world.

5 The transition of union politics has been a focus of neo-Marxist and post-Marxist scholars, extending to Autonomist school. For example, scholars including Mario Tronti (2019 [1966]), Andre Gorz (1968) and Claus Offe have commented on the shift in union politics as a consequence of the institutionalisation of unions into an organisation within the capitalist system – thereby taking over the role of a mediator between capitalists and workers. In the essay published in *Socialist Register* and titled 'Reform and Revolution' (1968), Gorz points out the mystification of bourgeoisie democracy; he also warns against socialist reforms that will integrate working-class organisations into the state. Similarly, Mario Tronti builds on Lenin, pointing out the problematics surrounding the formalisation of labour organisations and how this enables capitalists to use unions:

> We know it. And Lenin knew it before us. And before Lenin, Marx also discovered, in his own living experience, how the most difficult point is the move to organisation. The continuity of the struggle is a simple matter; the workers need only themselves and the boss facing them. But continuity of organisation is a rare and complex thing: as soon as organisation is institutionally formalised, it is immediately used by capitalism or by the workers' movement on capitalism's behalf – hence the speed with which workers passively abandon forms of organisation that they have only just won. (Tronti 2019 [1966], 59)

In *Disorganized Capitalism* (1985), Offe talks about the twin logics of collective action in which unions face the dilemma of operating under a capitalist regime while trying to balance the welfare of workers. That is, 'the workers can neither submit to the logics of the market, nor can they escape from the market' (213), forcing them to adopt opportunism as an analytical/organisational strategy to 'resolve the problems connected with the precarious coexistence of the two logics of collective action' (215).

6 In his book *Understanding Class*, Wright (2015, 185–6) points out that class compromise as a concept invokes three images. Firstly, where compromise is an illusion or rather 'one-sided capitulations rather than reciprocal bargains'. In this case, the unions enter into deals that

promise general benefits for workers with the capitalist, but end up with empty promises. Secondly, class compromise appears as 'stalemates on a battlefield', with a compromise being entered into to prevent 'mutual damages in exchange of concessions on both sides'. Wright refers to this as 'negative class compromise'. Finally, class compromise takes on 'a form of mutual cooperation between opposing classes', this is referred to as 'positive class compromise' or non-zero-sum game, as it enables both parties to secure gains through co-operation.

7 Studies have shown how Kerala's development model has largely ignored the grievances of socially marginalised communities including the Dalits, Adivasis, fishing communities and gender and sexual minorities (Kurien 1995; Devika 2016; Steur 2009; Raj 2013; Pramod 2020; Sudheesh 2023). These critiques also extend to problematising the absence of solidarity from institutionalised trade unions for these social justice struggles (Rammohan 1998; Raman 2010; Raj 2019).

8 Lukács 1972 (46) observes that the omission of the definition of class by Marx had 'serious consequences both for the theory and practice of the proletariat'. The discussion then encompasses problematising the meaning and practical function of class consciousness.

9 In *Beyond Capital?*, Lebowitz (2003, 24–5) details the various critiques of 'Actually Existing Marxism', focusing particularly on Marx's inability to rise above the level of political economy, the missing book on labour (Rubel, as cited in O'Malley and Algozin 1981; Negri 1991) and consideration of his silence on the question of 'human experience', exploring the arguments, or rather criticisms, posed by Thompson (1978) and Cohen (1982). According to Cohen (1982), the experiences of fascism, Stalinism and the New Deal have crushed expectations surrounding the classical version of Marxian theory, thereby necessitating a reassessment of the theory. Cohen divides attempts to engage with and improve Marxian class analysis into the following categories: Marcuse's attempt to portray the non-working class as the new revolutionary agent (students/New Left/New Class); Mallet and Gorz's attribution of radicality to the new working class; and the structuralist critiques of these neo-Marxian approaches as laid out by Poulantzas and Wright (which Cohen monikers as the boundary problem). The analysis by structuralist Marxist has been described as an 'exercise in pigeonholing' class categories using boundaries. There is an objectivist and deterministic tendency for the structuralist, so much so that the issue is never about subjectivity, alienation or class-consciousness. What Poulantzas suggests may be the 'new petty bourgeoisie', Wright moves beyond it to draw new contours to class boundaries, coming up with the category of 'contradictory class position', which can 'go either way' in the struggle between capital and labour.

10 Expounding an 'ecological Marxist theory', O'Connor (1988) distinguishes between the 'first and second contradictions of capitalism', in which the second contradiction interprets environmental movements as a response to the capitalist destruction of the conditions of production.

11 Newell (2005) highlights how environmental inequality reflects and reinforces other forms of hierarchy and exploitation too, for example along the lines of race and gender.

12 It is important to notice that inquiries into the relationship between class and environmentalism are dominated by studies that reduce environmental movements into entities that 'ignore class and other social inequalities' (Foster 1993, 12). Exploring the limits of environmentalism without class, Foster notes that environmentalism is a middle-class organisation that maintains disdain against the interest of workers. This chapter seeks to challenge this argument using a incidence of a grassroots environmental movement, whose members articulate their grievances in terms of class. To show the complex operation of structural and individual factors, studies exploring the environmental movements in the Global South have often adopted a political economy approach (Bandyopadhyay and Shiva 1988). For example, Nilsen's (2008) Marxian analysis of the conflict over dam-building on the Narmada River in western India illustrates how the Narmada movement influenced the trajectory of capitalist development in postcolonial India. Nonetheless, critiques problematise the 'red and green' categorisation of Indian environmental movements (Baviskar 2005). Situated in this context of debates surrounding the red shades of green politics in the Global South, the chapter revisits the 'dilemma of class vs. ecology' (Foster 1993) by tracing the class orientations and Marxian politics that underlie PMVS.

13 Class and class consciousness emerged as some of the dominant themes in the interview transcripts as the members of the respective movements tried to unpack their demands, motivations and goals. Though much of these references involved critiques of the ongoing

model of class politics, the participants continued to construct their stories using the lexicons of class. However, the interpretation of these class categories and interests has not always been the same. This project is an attempt to trace out the varied interpretations surrounding class, class interests, and class conflicts. These interpretations are similar to the conceptualisation of class consciousness by scholars including Lukács (1972) and Mann (1973). So far as the definition of class consciousness is concerned, it overlaps with Marx's position of it being an awareness – a collective awareness rather – of social class and an understanding of the structure of capitalist production, as well the inherent conflicts between different classes.

14 In their seminal book *Varieties of Environmentalism*, Ramachandra Guha and Martinez-Alier succinctly point out the contrast between the 'full-stomach' environmentalism of the Global North and the 'empty-belly' environmentalism of the Global South. (Guha and Martinez-Alier 2013). The environmentalism of the poor, they argue, originates 'in social conflicts over access to, and control over, natural resources: conflicts between peasants and industry over forest produce, for example, or between rural and urban populations over water and energy' (xxi).

15 The chapter builds on Thompson's understanding of class consciousness as a way to handle the class experiences in cultural terms. In his words, 'The class experience is largely determined by the productive relations into which men are born – or enter involuntarily. Class consciousness is the way in which these experiences are handled in cultural terms: embodied in traditions, value systems, ideas and institutional forms … Consciousness of class arises in the same way in different times and places, but never in just the same way' (9–10).

16 As discussed in Chapter 4, the frontline leaders of the PMVS were engaged in social justice activism in the region. Perhaps, due to the long history and experience with mobilisation, PMVS is the movement group that actively invests and engages in the interpretive and framing tasks of the greens.

17 *Pokkali* rice is a salt-tolerant traditional rice cultivar that is grown in the coastal saline soils of Kerala. *Pokkali* farming, the disaffected agrarian practice mentioned in the narrative, stands out as a unique, organic farming system for cultivating *Pokkali* rice which has been recognised by the Geographical Indication (GI) Registry. The narrative explains how impending issues arising from industrial pollution adversely affect the cultivators of this unique rice variety.

18 Personal interview with Muneer, 10 June 2018, at ESIC hospital, Udyogamandal, Pathalam. During the interview Muneer narrated many instances in which migrant workers were not included in unions. He elaborated on the abysmal living and working conditions they need to face.

19 Kerala has made the news for calling migrant workers as 'guest workers', especially during the Covid-19 pandemic; the state has also recently opened an 'Athidhi' portal in the wake of attacks on migrant families there. The move came to curb fear surrounding the spread of the Covid-19 virus in migrant workers' settlements; it was also an attempt to elevate the status of the workers by re-labelling them as 'guests'. https://www.news18.com/news/buzz/kerala-calling-labourers-guest-and-not-migrant-amid-coronavirus-crisis-has-a-lesson-for-us-all-2553179.html.

20 Class solidarity, in the Marxian sense, implies the sense of unity and shared interests among members of a social class that emerge from the shared situation of exploitation. For Marx, it was important to recognise the shared experiences of exploitations and common goals in order to collectivise and organise to advance class interests (Marx 1848,1867; Surin 2010).

6
Frame-disputes between labour and environmental movements

> *If you dig a well near my home … the water will taste like DDT … The river is dying, and our drinking water sources are poisoned by heavy metals from the industries*. (Kumar, Research Co-ordinator, PMVS)

> *The claim surrounding drinking water pollution is absurd. This can never happen as the river never flows to the east … No industry on the banks of Periyar can pollute it!!* (Padmanabhan, trade union leader and Secretary of SCTU)

One of the prominent features of the conflict between trade unions and green movements in the Eloor-Edayar region has been the opposing interpretations and meanings constructed by the two movements around the issue of industrial pollution. As the excerpts at the beginning show, strong disagreement remains about whether the River Periyar is indeed polluted – and if it is, who is responsible? The exploration here is thus at the interpretive level, known as 'movement talk' within the literature, involving study of the contested frames produced by these two movements. Drawing on interviews, campaign materials and documents, this chapter reveals how the two movements strive to create opposing versions of reality through their respective movement frames. It taps into the minutiae of these competing frames that attack and dispute the claims featured in the opponent's collective action frames. Therefore, by engaging in a continuous process of creating contesting frames, the movements enter a dispute on reality that is at once ontological and ideological.

Ontological disputes revolve around contentions on the existence and causes of pollution, whereas ideological discords centre on contestations surrounding the idioms and practices of development.

These contested 'development frames' elucidate the tensions between trade unions and environmentalists regarding their divergent interpretations of development. While unions associate development with 'economic progress and growth', greens focus upon 'environmental justice and sustainability'. Most importantly, the evidence presented in this chapter highlights the nexus between unions and industries and establishes the political-economic underpinnings of contesting frames. The findings of this chapter thus reiterate how structural and political-economic factors influence the micromobilisation processes and grievance interpretations of local social movements.

Understanding 'movement talk' using framing and counterframing

Social movements engage in the active process of constructing and challenging aspects of reality (Lofland 1985. As Benford and Snow observe, 'the very existence of social movement indicates differences within society regarding the meaning of some aspect of reality' (Benford and Snow 2000, 626). The disputes over reality are enhanced by the context of fields involving both movements and countermovements. Here negotiating reality becomes a contested process as each movement seeks to construct its version in opposition to that of its adversary. Such a process of constructing and interpreting grievances is known to scholars as 'framing' and through collective action frames such interpretations are disseminated across the audience. In that regard, frame[1] analysis also operates as a heuristic tool to unmask the 'meaning work' – that is, the 'struggle over the production of mobilizing and countermobilizing ideas and meanings' (Benford and Snow 2000, 613).

Furthermore, studies in the case of movements and countermovements (hereafter referred to as M/CM) reveal that discrepancies surrounding the perception of reality will result in the production of frames that contest or reject the opponent's version (Benford 1993a; Ellingson 1995; McCaffrey and Keys 2000). This means, in effect, that not all movements 'share the same frame or interpretation of reality', thus creating disputes in frames or intra-movement frame-disputes (Benford 1993a, 678).[2] Though the presence of frame-disputes is considered ubiquitous within movements, the frame-disputes that occur between movements and countermovements remain less examined, particularly in the context of movements from the Global South. It is in this context that I examine the competing narratives constructed through the

collective action frames adopted by both unions and green movements surrounding the issue of industrial pollution in the Eloor-Edayar region.

The conflicts between the two movements are conceived as a contestation surrounding meanings and interpretations on the issues of pollution and industrial development. I seek to interpret such issues by uncovering the frame-disputes that arise between the two movements as they try to persuade their audiences and gain legitimacy for their respective versions of reality. Additionally, the discussions delve into the politics of denial, highlighting how such denial stems from the embeddedness of trade unions and workers in the political economy of industrial capitalism.

Frame-disputes between PMVS and SCTU

Collective action frames sift through the incidents and focus upon what is relevant; they also articulate a particular set of meanings and transform grievances into injustices in the context of collective action (Snow 2004, 384). The efforts to convey alternative versions of reality to the constituents, audience and bystanders result in the production of disputing frames that compete with the meanings and interpretations presented in the opponent's frames (Benford 1993a; Benford and Snow 2000; McCaffrey and Keys 2000). The interpretive processes leading to the identification of the problem ('what is at stake') influence the potential solutions ('what ought to be done') and how it should be articulated to gain the support of the audience ('call to action') (Benford 1993a; Benford 1993b; Benford and Snow 2000). The analysis presented below identifies and explicates the prevailing ontological and ideological disputes between trade unions and green movements in the Eloor-Edayar industrial belt.

Ontological disputes between SCTU and PMVS

A careful examination of the contesting frames produced by the trade unions and green movements reveals that the majority of the diagnostic frame-disputes are ontological in nature. The disputes in ontology[3] emerge, in a context where the two movements debate 'reality' as they construct competing meanings and interpretations surrounding the existence of environmental issues or the absence thereof. The union collective (SCTU) and green movements in the Eloor-Edayar region, through their respective collective action frames, seek not only to

establish their own version of reality about the issue of pollution, but also to negate the alternative version constructed by the opponent.

In the next sections I explore the framing processes and examine the disputed claims made by trade unions and environmental movements regarding the existence and causes of pollution. It identifies and explores both the diagnostic (existence and causes of pollution) and prognostic (potential solutions) frame disputes that exist between the SCTU and the green movement in the region. The section demonstrates how the diagnostic disputes then create further disputes at the level of prognosis and frame resonance, as the movements dispute with one another over the potential course of action to fix the identified problem. Such ontological disagreements surrounding the existence of industrial pollution thus extends to encompass the prognostic and frame resonance disputes between trade unions and environmental campaigners.

'The river is polluted vs. the river isn't': disputes on the existence of pollution

A flyer announcing the public meeting 'A confluence to save Periyar', organised by green activists in August 2012, ended with the cry: 'Save Periyar, don't let the river die'. One of the discernible effects of pollution in the region was the contamination of drinking water sources (Krishnakumar 2004; Suchitra 2006). As shown in this slogan, the frames of the green movements recognised the centrality of the river in sustaining human life; they were consequently constructed around the pollution of River Periyar. The 'critical and alarmist frame' urges constituents, audience and bystanders to join the collective effort to 'save' the river from dying – in so doing attributing agency to the river as an actor with life and rights (Gamson and Modigliani 1989). A pamphlet circulated to inform the local people about a '*Jala Satyagraham*' (water *Satyagraha*, a form of environmental protest inspired by non-violent resistance, in Eloor often staged on boats) organised by the PMVS for 14 June 2013, declared:

> We are engaged in a Herculean task to save the river from pollution and to let Periyar flow as a river again. If we do not get enough rain this year, the drinking water supply for the district of Ernakulam will be in jeopardy. We had to drink salty water many times this year and we are yet to know about the amount of chemicals we took in along with this salty water. Access to safe drinking water is our right, and we need to take to the streets to secure our rights to live

> as guaranteed in our constitution. We request all of you to join this event to fight against pollution.

The excerpt seeks to identify pollution as the problem and to propose the ways in which collective action can effectively change this situation. The statement underscores their vocabulary of motive (Benford 1993b) by calling on people to save the river and drinking water sources from the imminent danger of pollution. The injustice frames constructed by the greens establish a compelling case of 'injustice' by presenting access to safe drinking water as being under the purview of justiciable rights, then establishing how this right is violated by the presence of pollutants. Articulating the lack of access to safe drinking water as a violation of the right to life guaranteed by the Indian constitution, the statement successfully interprets this as unjust. Furthermore, the choice of *Jala Satyagraham* (water *Satyagraha*) as a mode of protest reveals the centrality of the river as both the object and the field of protest in this context. Another pamphlet published by PMVS identifies the problem against which they are fighting and attributes blame to the industries and the PCB. The excerpt reads:

> We are organising a People's Convention on this World Environment Day to protest against the adamant and haughty industries in the Eloor-Edayar industrial region, who are polluting Periyar, a river that sustains the life of many lakhs of people … This convention also aims to chart out the plan for picketing the Pollution Control Board (PCB), in order to tame this white elephant who is facilitating the cruel and dismal act of industrial pollution … We are organising this protest by standing on the side of the people affected by this menace … We will always stand by the people marginalised by this rabid approach to development.

Clearly distinguishing 'us' (the fighters against pollution) from 'them' (the industrial polluters), the framing process here identifies and delineates boundaries that surround the identity and motives of both protagonists and antagonists (Gamson 1988; Gamson et al. 1992; Steuter 1992; Benford and Hunt 1994; Polletta and Ho 2006, 5). The pollution of the river and the lack of access to clean and safe drinking water have been crucial aspects of the diagnostic frames constructed by the environmental movement. Much of the grievance construction seeks to establish the existence of pollution and the potential danger involved in consuming water that contains high levels of toxic contaminants.

The use of scientific findings embellishes the green movement's claims surrounding pollution. The combination of scientific evidence and stories of pollution garner 'empirical credibility' and 'experiential commensurability' for the greens' frames (Snow and Benford 1988; 1992; Benford and Snow 2000, 619), thus making them more resonant among the people. Using studies from government agencies and scientific institutions such as the Central Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change, PMVS seeks to draw the attention of the audience to the extent of pollution by highlighting the fact that the Eloor-Edayar region is ranked 24th among the list of 'critically polluted areas' in India.

The reference to scientific findings and studies in the construction of collective action frames is part of the strategy of activism adopted by the local environmental movement, as it strives to combine 'study and struggle' as discussed in Chapters 3, 4 and 5. Roopesh, a young and enthusiastic activist of the PMVS, described how witnessing the accumulated wastes inside industrial units closed for violating environmental guidelines inspired him to join the anti-pollution bandwagon. As he explains:

> I can show you plastic waste heaps inside the premises of Sree Sakthi Paper Mills … These are plastic waste mountains that span approximately 1 acre (43,530 sq.ft) … and as tall as a three-floor building … I mean, this is my approximate calculation. It was the photo of this waste heap that I had taken to the RDO during the discussion. It is still there and none of the politicians or party affiliates are asking the company to clear that out. PCB [Pollution Control Board] had put up a notice asking someone to remove this waste for Rs.35 lakhs ($48,044), but no one took up this offer. This plastic waste is slowly leaching into our drinking water. The Muppathadom Drinking Water plant is roughly 2.5 km (1.55 miles) away from the company's land. The waste will inevitably get into the drinking water and all these people are consuming it. (Roopesh, member of PMVS, personal interview, 27 May 2018)

As revealed in the above narrative, the closure of industries does not end the problem of leaking industrial waste. Lack of proper enforcement of environmental regulations by a negligent PCB leads to the seepage of polluting materials into the river. The presence of state authorities such as the PCB highlights the issue of institutional power and the unequal access to such centres of power in the movement field occupied by trade unions and greens in the region.

However, the claims surrounding the existence of pollution and the contamination of drinking water sources receive vehement attacks from trade unions and industries. The SCTU systematically denies claims surrounding the pollution of drinking water sources. Countering concerns about the influx of pollutants into the drinking water supply system, an excerpt from an article in the union newsletter denies this possibility altogether:

> The stretch of the river that runs under the Pathaalam bund comprises only two percent of the entire river, which is 244 kilometres long. The drinking water is not collected from this stretch. In other words, almost all major industries operate in the estuary area that amounts to only two per cent of the entire length of this river … The water treatment plant in Alwaye, which provides drinking water to the Greater Cochin area, is situated 15 kilometres above the industrial stretch of Periyar (the stretch of the river flowing through the industrial belt). People who spread lies like 'the drinking water is poisoned' conveniently hide this fact. Framing stories about Periyar running to the east is like claiming that 'a crow can fly upside-down' [a local adynaton, having meanings similar to the phrase 'pigs might fly']. (SCTU 2012, 2)

The debates surrounding the flow of the river and the possibility of drinking water contamination highlight the extent to which the two movements engage in contesting claims. A sarcastic remark often made by the union collective regarding the contamination of drinking water sources was that 'the river should jump quite a few bunds to make its way back into the drinking water pumping station' (Sunil 2013). When green activists explain how the pollutants flow to the drinking water supply station, trade unions use the direction of flow as a condition that would negate such a possibility of contamination altogether.[4] The narratives favoured by union leaders assert that it is impossible for the polluted stretch of the river to meet the unpolluted or cleaner stretch. However, environmental activists challenge this position, highlighting the fact that water gets pushed against its natural course during high tides and floods.

This debate takes an important turn in the context of the massive and devastating deluge that affected Kerala in August 2018, where floodwaters filled the chemical industries and carried industrial effluents in and around the region. During an interview with a local television channel Kumar,[5] the Research Coordinator of PMVS, described the deluge as 'toxic flooding' as it washed away chemicals stored in the

industries and deposited them in and around the region. He alleged that the floodwaters carried radioactive materials as well as heavy metals into the local ecology, hinting at the increased vulnerability of the region to natural disasters. The looming crises of climate change have increased the incidence and intensity of such erratic weather events for countries such as India.

The contest over reality expands to influence the ways in which both movements understand and perceive the River Periyar. The SCTU attempts to legitimise its denial of drinking water contamination and pollution at large by highlighting the zoning of the river, emphasising how that ensures the safety of water pumped through the drinking water supply station (SCTU 2012). At the same time environmentalists have responded openly, calling out the union's 'impossibility thesis' by amplifying the limits of dividing a river into watertight compartments. During an interaction between myself and Advocate Aseef, a member of the legal counsel representing the green movements, he expressed his dismay and frustration in reference to the unscientific and unrealistic classification of the River Periyar into various zones based on 'designated best use'.

> The State Pollution Control Board always makes an absurd averment that river water in the Eloor–Edayar industrial area at the tail end of Eloor branch of the River Periyar, within 1 km from the confluence point, is classified as 'E' class and best designated for irrigation, industrial cooling and controlled waste disposal, not for domestic purpose. Can we compartmentalise and classify a river based on the whims and fantasies of the mighty exploiters of its water? Though it seems possible to sort the river into separate compartments or zones, the river is an entity much larger than that conception … The river is a comprehensive flow of organic life that cannot be confined into compartments … It flows. And by the time we have this realisation, there will be no river left to save … by then, Periyar will just be a river that exists in the pages of history. (Adv. Aseef, lawyer, personal interview, 15 June 2018)

Thus the claims and counter-claims narrated above attempt respectively to accept and deny the contamination of drinking water sources by industrial effluents. By relying on the river's direction of flow, trade unions seek to establish that it is not possible for the river to flow against its usual course (east to west); in doing so they reject the claims about contamination, citing that the river does not flow from west to east.

Contrary to this, environmentalists argue that the river is a flowing body of water that seldom remains within the boundaries we draw.

As narratives convey, the SCTU and the green movements are simultaneously trying to promote alternative versions of reality surrounding the issue of drinking water contamination. In short, these debates over pollution uncover an ontological dispute in which the movements seek to persuade an audience to accept a particular reality through their respective movement frames.

Exploring the disputes regarding the causes of pollution

'Periyar River turns black again' and 'No end to discoloration of Periyar' were two of the titles used in reports describing visible effects of pollution in River Periyar in leading newspapers (*The Times of India* 2018; *The Hindu* 2019). These titles signify how the river continues to be a symbol of pollution in the region. As discussed in previous chapters, photographs of the River Periyar running in many colours have played a significant role in gaining support for the cause from the media and mainstream society. The river stands as a testimony to the years of industrial pollution that have happened in the Eloor-Edayar region. Discoloration of the river and fish kills have been two manifest effects or visible indicators of the release of industrial discharges into the river[6] (*The Times of India* 2017; Narayanan 2019). Trade unions and green movements drift apart and create competing explanations as they try to pin down the causes of these environmental anomalies. Both sides attribute the blame for the discoloration of the river and fish kills to different actors and entities.

According to the local environmental movement, the discoloration of the river is one of the most discernible effects of the release of untreated industrial effluents into the river. 'The river was running in 365 colours in 365 days, and that's when we decided to jump in and do something to stop this,' commented Maqbool, a green activist, when asked about the many shades of the river.

The river no longer runs discoloured throughout the year. The number of such incidents has been drastically reduced as the result of astute interventions from local environmental activists. In the words of Shibu:

> The river we see today is not the same as the one I had seen 10 years ago … because then (10 years back) the river runs in a different colour every day … Immediately after the colour of the river changed, someone would call us, there was hue and

> cry … then we all will go to PCB … fights, issues, altercations, arguments, cases etc … all of that has changed now … We have come a long way ahead … and that has happened because of our activities … no politician or political party can make any claims about the changes here. I mean, even if they take credit we don't mind … all we want is to see the river run clear … That's our only aim, that the river runs clear and people get clean drinking water. (Shibu, local environmentalist, personal interview, 10 May 2018)

The improvement in the local environmental quality may be attributed to the relentless fights and struggles carried out by the local environmental movement. As discussed in Chapters 1 and 3, ranging from the regulation of industrial discharges, installation of effluent treatment plants and the distribution of free-drinking water to the local people, the environmental movement has accomplished many positive outcomes in the region. However, despite these substantive changes, the river continues to flow in many colours. Green activists attribute this to the release of untreated effluents into the river through hidden discharge pipes installed by the industries.

The discharge from PML is held responsible for the changing colours of the river. In addition to PML, leather and other pharmaceutical industries have also featured on the greens' list of companies polluting the river (Joseph 2019). However, the unions completely deny the claim that the river's change in colour has anything to do with industrial discharge. According to Dixon, a union representative, discoloration is an issue staged by the green activists to keep the issue of pollution live and active. He opined that 'we have clear evidence to implicate the green activists in connection to the discoloration. They bring chemicals in bottles and mix them in the river and orchestrate all of this … they are creating the discoloration'.

Abu, a local environmental activist, dismissed the allegations pertaining to sabotage. He stated that

> They allege that we carried chemicals in a bottle and poured it in the river. I mean, it would have made more sense to say that we dumped a barrel full of chemicals … because only such massive amounts can cause discoloration over a massive stretch of river.

One of the key strategies of denial deployed by the trade unions includes counterframing tactics that aim at challenging and discrediting the green activists. An article written by a trade union leader

actively defends PML by shifting the blame on to 'plots' orchestrated by the local environmental movement. An excerpt from this article declares:

> Green activists have fabricated images by using digital technology to paint the clean water released from company drains green. They then used these pictures to frame news reports against the company … Most environmentalists are ready to stoop to any levels to implicate the company … Later it was proved that the photograph was fabricated during an investigation conducted by the PCB. The PCB also confirmed that this was not water released from PML's drain. So there is an active conspiracy to dismantle this company. Despite many failed attempts such plots are ongoing. (Gopinath 2012, 18)

In addition to denying the responsibility of industries, the Standing Council actively pursues a strategy to deflect the cause of pollution on to other factors. Over the course of years, the union frames have transformed from complete denial to selective denial; the frames now accept the claim that River Periyar is polluted, but maintain that the pollution can be traced to sources other than industries. According to the SCTU newsletter, the poor quality of water in the river can be attributed to many factors other than the industries. Narrowing down the factors causing pollution, an article (EC SCTU 2012) in the newsletter pins the reasons for reduced water flow on to 'the decline in rainfall, and the multiple hydro-electric projects constructed across the river'. It then claims that these factors are responsible for the changes in water quality, the diversity of aquatic organisms, the decreasing availability of fish and the infiltration of saline water. Furthermore, the article points out that:

> Even if there were no industries, all these issues would remain. It is impossible to eliminate any of these causes. For example, electricity generation, irrigation, drinking water supply are all inevitable things for a modern society. Similarly plantations, the use of pesticides are all necessary. The booming construction sector adversely affected the river. The untreated wastewater from nearby hospitals, theatres, flats etc. are flowing to the river and that has adversely affected the quality of water. (Environment Cell 2012)

As demonstrated in the narrative above, the SCTU has adopted a strategy of denial and deflection as they discuss the issue of pollution and river discoloration. In addition, the frames created by the union collective bear close resemblance to claims made by the industries exposing the nexus between themselves and the trade unions (a form of hegemonic allegiance). A careful comparison of the booklets published by the Standing Council, articles written by trade union leaders and pamphlets published by the industries demonstrates a coherence in terms of the frames used against the green movement. The influence of industries and the PCB in constructing these union frames highlights the influence of the political economy of development and industrialisation in constructing movement frames. Responding to the allegations surrounding the release of untreated effluents from PML and the resultant change of colour in the river, an article in one of the booklets circulated by the Standing Council states that:

> When the river changed colour in 2003, the green activists attacked PML by declaring war on the company. They were soon disappointed when another company came forward and took the blame for the discoloration of the river. The management confessed that the change in colour was caused by acids and furnace oil released from the company.

The effort made to draw connections between pollution to industries other than PML substantiates green movements' claims regarding the strong nexus between Standing Council and this industry. The above excerpt carefully absolves PML from the responsibility of pollution by implicating other industries operating along the banks of the river. Such construction of grievances alludes to the role of industries and their logics of profits in influencing the frames constructed by the unions, even as they aim to damage and attack the green movements' credibility. As an extension of the discussion in Chapter 5, the alliance of the Standing Council with the industries conveys the complexities that underlie the conflictual relationship between trade unions and environmental movements.

What kills the fish?

Another discernible effect of river pollution has been fish killings. The release of untreated and toxic effluents into the river often results in massive fish kills occurring along the industrial stretch of the river. Recollecting memories about the largest fish kills that happened in River Periyar, Ibrahim noted:

> On 11 June 1998 fish kills happened in Eloor. This was unlike any other incidents that happened in the region before … This instance, which happened during the monsoons, was the largest in the history of Periyar … around 5 crores (50 million USD) worth of fish were killed in the river for over a stretch of 12 kms (7.5 miles). Big fish, I mean fish that were as big as adult human beings, were among those that were killed. (Ibrahim, member of PMVS, personal interview, 10 July 2018)

Such massive fish kills have often been treated as an indicator of the abysmal quality of water and its adverse effects on the river ecosystem. However, the Standing Council and trade union members maintain a different perspective regarding the origin and causes of fish kills. According to Periyar Action Plan, a document published by the Standing Council:

> *Fish kills have been reported from the River Periyar as well as many other rivers in Kerala. This has always been attributed to industrial pollution, by the public as well as a section of the media. The exact reason for fish kills could not be found out so far. It is easy to blame industries for all evils because they are inherently polluting*. Presence of toxic chemicals from industrial or agricultural discharges, sudden environmental changes during the onset of monsoon, depletion of dissolved oxygen due to the dumping of organic wastes like seepage or a combination of these factors can be the possible reasons for fish kills. A detailed investigation is required to find out the exact reason of fish kills in the River Periyar before jumping to conclusions or pointing fingers. (Environment Cell 2012, 3) [author's italics]

However, fish kills are not a thing of the past. On 7 April 2019 the River Periyar flowed in a different colour and dead fish covered the surface of the river. Environmental activists protested against the visible effects of pollution and poor water quality by posting images of the River Periyar flowing in multiple colours during a single week. The activists also used the Live feature on Facebook to spread this live coverage of pollution to the outside world. Confirming the narrative presented by the unions, the Chairman of the Kerala State Pollution Control Board (PCB) issued the following press release:

> We have already informed the two municipalities of this and will shortly issue directions to them to ready sewage-treatment plants

> at the earliest. This is because fish kills are more probable due to the discharge of untreated sewage into the water body upstream than due to effluents from factories being discharged downstream … Eutrophication of the Periyar and the regulator [bunds] that restrict tidal flushing during summer are leading to fish kill. (Paul 2019)

In other words, the Standing Council and the State PCB join hands in deflecting the blame away from industries and on to other factors such as 'algal bloom' (*The Hindu* 2019; Joseph 2019), 'sewage problems', 'eutrophication' and 'low oxygen levels'. The careful elimination of industrial pollutants or any mention of industries exposes the vigil deployed by the industries, trade unions and PCB to not implicate industries nor render them culpable for the observed effects of pollution in the river.

The frame-disputes regarding the existence and cause of pollution clearly articulate the ontological disputes replete in the construction of reality by the two movement groups. Both the movements seek to establish competing versions surrounding the prevalence and causes of pollution and the condition of the River Periyar. As observed by Esacove (2004), the framing and counterframing processes are interactive here, as each movement attempts to invest 'pollution' with such meanings as will motivate direct action to 'support its overarching political goals'.

Save Periyar vs. save industries: ideological disputes in frames

The frame-disputes between trade unions and environmental movements contest the issue of 'pollution' and draw meaning from different values, interests and ideologies (Esacove 2004; Mooney and Hunt 1996; Benford 1997). Distinguishing between frames and ideologies, Oliver and Johnston (2000) point out that ideology moves beyond cognitive focus to include normative and value dimensions. These ideologies transcend beyond the level of the individual to include aspects of the economy, the political economy of development, jobs, the environment and industrialisation. This section demonstrates how the frame-disputes between trade unions and the green movements are ideological in nature; the contests are also over the value hierarchies and beliefs that produce a distinct theory of society and social events for each of these movements. Unions and green movements make sense of (and interpret the idea and process of) development in very different ways, which manifest as frame-disputes.

The frames constructed by the unions call for actions to 'save the industries' from the ulterior motives and attacks of green organisations.

A clear divide exists between the unions and the environmental movement in their approaches to understanding the connections between the environment and the processes of industrial development. While discussing conflicts with the green movements, Raheem, a trade union leader, complained that such organisations portray the industries as 'anti-environmental':

> There is a calculated attempt to portray industries in Kerala as anti-environmental … Such an atmosphere is being created so that it becomes difficult for industries to operate in the state. This is mainly aimed at stalling/impeding all production activities in the state. Kerala is a commercial state … a consumer state that depends on other states and even other countries for everything ranging from salt to camphor. The attempts to hinder whatever little industrial production exists in the state and to import these very products from outside are part of a hidden agenda, operated by some outside monopolies. (Raheem, union leader, personal interview, 23 May 2018)

The narrative portrays environmentalism as a form of activism that jeopardises the process of production, industrialisation and commerce. In addition to observing that the green movements are driven by 'anti-industrial' forces, it also alleges that they are funded by rival industries that seek to gain a monopoly over production operations and markets. The local environmental movement repeatedly states that their mobilisation is not against industries per se, but against the pollution of the environment with toxic and hazardous products. In Kumar's words:

> We have never taken a stand against industries or have asked for their closing down. We have never said anywhere that we do not want industries!! Though we are not against industries, the advancements in science, technology and progress urge us to rethink about industries … which also implies that we must phase out a few industries … For example, consider DDT: the global community decided not to use DDT and Endosulphan. Such decisions stem from international campaigns and realisations that Endosulphan is a genotoxin. When such incidents happen, many industries must abandon the production of deadly chemicals. That should be a welcome step in our way to progress. There are some Sunset industries; we may have to abandon such industries. But at the same time, an industry becomes a meaningful activity when

> we can create new job opportunities through restructuring and revamping of industrial operations. I mean we cannot be adamant and say that we will only produce Urea or DDT. We have to re-think and re-imagine the products and production mechanisms in a timely manner. (Kumar, Research Coordinator of PMVS, personal interview, 26 May 2018)

The description above underlies the stand adopted by the local environmental movement on industries and pollution. When the Standing Council labels the green movement as a movement 'against industries', the greens clearly explain that they are not fighting industries as such: their battle is rather against pollution and the production of pesticides that pose a serious threat to the health and wellbeing of people as well as to the environment. The conflict in narratives moves to the conceptual and ideational terrains of the economy and economic growth, as well as their complicated relationship with the environment. When questioned about a potential impasse between development and the environment, Akbar, a trade union representative, stated that:

> Environment and development are like two beads in a necklace. Both are important, and we need to strike a healthy balance between the two. Ours is a small state, we need industries and we need to protect our environment. Development can take many forms. If we look at industrial development … has our state's environment suffered from industrial development? No. The destruction of the environment in our state is not due to industrial development. The wetlands and paddy fields in our state face destruction from builders. Construction activities are taking a toll on our environment. The environmental damage due to industries in our state is scant … a very small percentage of loss when compared to the total. (Akbar, member of PMVS, personal interview, 27 May 2018)

Despite their presentation of environment and industry as two equally important beads in a necklace, the unions clearly prefer one bead over the other. A booklet published by the Standing Council in 2012 carried the title 'My Periyar, My Industry: We Need Both' (*Ente Periyar Ente Vyavassayam: Venam Namukku Randum*). This title conveys the increased attention devoted to discussing interactions between industries and the environment within the union collective. An excerpt from an article in this booklet argues that:

> There is no alternative to drinking water and jobs. We cannot let anyone rob us off these necessities. Land, air, water, agriculture, development and jobs – these are all birthrights. There are intricate connections between the river that is the source of our drinking water and industries, which offer us jobs.' (Gopinath 2012, 3)

This statement carefully equates jobs and drinking water as necessities. The tactful framing describes both development and jobs as 'birthrights' in an attempt to present its denial as an issue of injustice and portray the conflict as a trade-off between jobs and the environment. Attempts to introduce the River Periyar as a source of both drinking water and industries expose the strategic counterframing tactics employed by the unions, in which they hone their frames to include 'river' so as to resonate with people who care for it. Furthermore, by explicating the river as a source of both drinking water and industries, the unions strive hard to attack the frames of the green movement, which call upon people to save the river from imminent dangers posed by chemical industries and pollution.

The Standing Council (SCTU) actively works to present ongoing tensions in the region as a trade-off between 'jobs vs. the environment'. In fact, the concern of workers constitutes a major aspect of the counterframes constructed by the Standing Council to challenge the green movements and their frames surrounding pollution. In pitting jobs against the environment Kabeer, a trade union leader, states that:

> New industries are inevitable to offer gainful employment to a pool of workers. Derailing the growth of industries in the name of the environment cannot be tolerated … Environment is important, of course, we certainly have to preserve Kerala's rivers and Kerala's paddy fields … but to dismantle industries in the name of environment will do little good for industrial development. (Kabeer, union leader, personal interview, 3 July 2018)

As argued in this excerpt, the unions suggest that the rivers should not be preserved at the expense of industrial development. Union narratives are replete with such attempts to categorise the impasse between pollution and development as a requital between jobs and the environment. The terms used to describe the green movement are correspondingly hostile; they include 'environmental fundamentalists', 'eco-terrorists' and 'anti-developmentalists'. Clearly, the Standing Council expounds an ideology of development that is grounded in economic determinism. This fails to

consider nature as part of the equation and perceives such concerns to be less important.

In discussing the alternative model of industrial development suggested by the environmental movement, Kumar (a leader of the green movement) reaffirmed the need to consider diversifying existing industries. In his opinion:

> Diversification alone can bring new initiatives and new jobs. This has been the concept we have been trying to implement in Eloor. Despite that, the parties on the other side are not able to see this in a tolerant manner. That's the biggest danger. Instead of exploring options to diversify or engage in a dialogue to ameliorate the issues, they are in a rush to label our movement as 'anti-development' or 'anti-industries'.

Explaining their stand on development, Akbar, a member of the green movement, highlighted the need to 'redefine our conception of development' as the current model caters only to the interests of 'corporate capitalism'. Defining the possibilities of an alternative model of development, Kumar pointed out the need to embrace a sustainable mode of development that is based on 'production and not speculation'. The call to reimagine development is guided by a vision to strengthen agriculture, the primary sector of the economy. Rooted in an ideology of progress defined in terms of agrarian self-sufficiency and environmental sustainability, the movement calls for a revamping of the system and structures in order to create and nurture expertise to bolster sustainable, safe and organic agrarian practices. In connecting this alternative approach to envisioning development, Muneer, an avid reader and film enthusiast in the green group, explained how the current model of development goes against the spirits of the state. It is thus soon likely to become a liability:

> Kerala is called 'God's' own Country' … so when you envision to bring development here, such practices should not destroy this place and its people … Rather it should nurture the things that make Kerala God's own country. We don't have to be adamant about defining development in terms of building four-lane roads … development can come as three-lane roads … neither do we have to be resolute about defining development in terms of having more vehicles on the streets … I mean, we are going to face a period of environmental crises and we cannot afford to put more vehicles

> on the streets of our state … We have to envision development by figuring in the many constraints we face as a state … There is a limit until which we can build roads … some companies here were forced to close when pollution became a liability … Similarly, this model of development is soon going to become a liability for us … development should not become a liability for us. (Muneer, a member of PMVS, personal interview, 13 May 2018)

As discussed in preceding chapters, especially in Chapter 5, the plunder of nature in the name of progress is considered (by the greens) as an aberration that derails the state from its own much acclaimed model of egalitarian development, the 'Kerala Model'. The excerpt highlights the differential priorities with which different stakeholders approach development, both as an idea and in practice. As Mohseen, a local environmental activist, opined:

> When drinking water becomes an issue … we should not obsess over economic growth … We should not be blinded by this mindless pursuit for rabid development where we fill up the wetlands and paddy fields to build roads and airports.

The disconnect between the economy and the environment is also reflected in the ways in which the two movements construct meaning surrounding the River Periyar and its purposes (Schnaiberg 1980). The dissimilar weightage attributed to economic progress and environmental conservation becomes apparent as the two movements explicate what the river means to them. According to the trade union representatives constituting the Standing Council, the primary function of the river is as a sink. A union leader explains, 'the industries came here, because of the River Periyar … Water remains crucial for the production processes … millions of tons (gallons) of water get taken from and released back into the river every day'. The function of the river as a crucial element in the production process, and its role as a sink to collect the industrial effluents, are central to the frames produced by the unions. In one of the newsletters published by the unions, the river's function was interpreted as follows:

> Life originated in water. All human civilisations flourished on the banks of rivers and lakes. So is the case with industrial development. Water and electricity are two essential requirements of all kinds [of] industries. Many of the industrial belts are developing along the river banks. (SCTU 2012, 3).

A utilitarian approach stands out from these narratives where water gains value from its role in creating electricity or in providing the necessary circumstances for carrying out industrial production. The river thus derives value from its significance in the process of production or energy generation; it is consequently bound to the economic role that it fulfils in the schema of economic development.

A comparative analysis of the two sets of narratives produced around industries and development by these two movement groups reveals that the Standing Council believes the 'fight against pollution' to be a 'fight against industries', whereas the green movements reiterate their standpoint that their movement is not against industries themselves but rather 'against pollution'. The opposing narratives explicate the differential focus of the two movements. Where the trade unions narrowly focus on the economic and monetary aspects of production, the green movements adopt a broader framework to understand the operation of industries in conjunction with their impact on both nature and people.

This divergent view also stems from the disparate value hierarchies that guide the two movement groups. The thematic discussions spanning these narratives can be read as a 'tug of war' between the economy and the environment. In other words, it is possible to read these conflicts as a conflict of ideology, in which the two movement groups work towards establishing their respective ideologies pertaining to the idea of development and economic progress. The excerpts featured here clearly indicate that the unions adopt an ideology of 'development as progress', tying largely into the neoliberal and capitalistic understandings of economic growth and development.

Discussion and conclusion

The exploration of the frame-disputes around the alternative approaches to development (Shiva 1991; Escobar 2011) and the economy (Patnaik 2018) unveil the ideological disputes between the unions and the green movement. Such disputes reveal the ways in which values and beliefs surrounding structural and political-economic aspects such as the economy, jobs or the model of development produce conflicts in the frames constructed by the two movement groups. The contesting claims surrounding jobs and the environment in the collective action frames signify the structural origins of frame-disputes, in which differences stem from the divergent ideologies adopted by the movements regarding the concept of progress, development and the interaction of such

processes with the environment. The schism between the economy and the environment (Schnaiberg 1980), as laid out in these disputing frames, affirm the structural roots of frame construction, interpretation and disputes between movement groups. The shift in the ideology of development in favour of the economy and neoliberal capital (Peet and Watts 2004), as explicated in Chapter 5, signifies the ways in which structural factors, including the global economic order, serve to influence the framing processes and cause frame-disputes.

The examination of the disputing frames constructed by the Standing Council and the local environmental movement reveals the opposing realities articulated by the two movement groups surrounding industrial pollution. This chapter exposed the ontological disputes ingrained in the frames developed by the two movement groups as they sought respectively to establish and deny the existence of pollution and attribute blame on to multiple entities. The constant negation of industrial pollution apparent in the frames adopted by the Standing Council represents socially organised denial (Norgaard 2006a; 2006b; 2011). Norgaard (2006b) observes that the non-response to climate change in Norway can be explained as a matter of socially organised denial, with the economic prosperity of the community being tied to the oil industry. On a similar note the economic interests of trade unions, being embedded within the industrial system of production, are bound up with industrial development and prosperity.

Given this situation, it is in the interest of unions collectively to deny the existence of pollution and the role of industries in engendering it. In other words, preserving the political economy of industrial development serves the economic interest of the workers; any move that adversely affects the industries' profits would mean lower wages and the erosion of income security for workers. In order to preserve the economic interests of workers and union leaders, the Standing Council deploys a strategy of denial. The frames and counterframes adopted by the unions are thus influenced by the political economy of industrial development, which embeds workers' interests firmly within the system of industrial production and profits.

In addition, the empirical evidence discussed in this chapter challenges the argument that frames distinguish the identities of the protagonists from the antagonists as 'human decision-makers' rather than 'impersonal forces such as industrialisation or the demands of the market' (Gamson 1988; Hunt et al. 1994; Polletta and Ho 2006, 5). The empirical evidence presented here illustrates that the frames interpret the antagonist not as a human decision-maker, but rather

as structural and political-economic forces, for instance the vices of mindless capitalism or industrialisation. Such a portrayal of antagonistic forces is typical in countries of the Global South, where people face off against capitalist forces by recognising and labelling their struggles as 'anti-capitalist mobilisations'.

The frames and counterframes discussed in this chapter vividly explicate the ways in which movements depict industrialisation, development, capitalism or imperialist agendas as adversaries or antagonistic forces against which the call for arms is produced. The ample references surrounding capitalism, industrialisation, development and imperialism can be traced back to the unique history of Kerala and the legacy of communist public action. This unique history of social movements and increased political participation from the people have rendered these terms familiar and native to inhabitants of Kerala, where people found resonance in the general meanings attributed to these terms.

People's proficiency with such lexicons enables the portrayal of such forces as antagonists in local conflicts. Many grassroots and indigenous struggles against Multinational Corporations (MNCs) have cared little about humanising the entity, preferring to present these corporations as faceless, 'psychopathic' entities that function with the sole pursuit of profit (Bakan 2004; Clark 2002; Martinez-Alier 2003; Kirsch 2007: Harvey 2010; Stibbe 2013). In other words, the significance of structural and political-economic processes in the frames is determined by the cultural and socio-political context of mobilisation, as well as the ideological standpoints and political participation of the people involved.

Notes

1 Frames are an interpretive package of messages aimed at recruiting adherents, garnering media attention, demobilising antagonists and achieving movement victories. They play an important role in persuasion as they demarcate and punctuate important aspects of movement reality (Gamson 1988; Snow and Benford 1988; Benford and Snow 2000; Polletta and Ho 2006, 2). According to Goffman (1974), frames or 'schemata of interpretation' enable an individual 'to locate, perceive, identify and label a seemingly infinite number of concrete occurrences defined in its terms'. Rooted in the social constructionist and symbolic interactionist traditions, meanings and interpretations play a pivotal role in this perspective.

2 Benford identifies three general types of intra-movement frame-disputes, diagnostic frame-disputes, prognostic frame-disputes and frame-resonance-disputes (Benford 1993a). Diagnostic frame-disputes erupt within movements over interpretations of reality (Benford 1993a, 679). So the dispute here is over the shared 'diagnosis' of the problem. Prognostic disputes emerge from 'disparate visions of an alternate reality' when movements disagree about 'what ought to be done' to transform the problematic aspect of reality. Frame-resonance-disputes are constituted as debates over the effectiveness of particular frames or framing strategies.

3 Ontology here refers to the 'study of being – the study of the basic building blocks of existence' (Moses and Knutsen 2012, 4).
4 Interviews with trade union leaders conducted on 21 May, 29 May, 3 June and 27 June 2018.
5 Interview with Kumar, a founding member of PMVS, interview on *Malanadu News*, 19 February 2019.
6 For more details of specific incidents see Paul and Pillai (1978), Patra (2014), *The New Indian Express* (2017) and *The Times of India* (2019).

7
Counterframing strategies and tactics

Beyond the discussions surrounding ideological underpinnings, it is important to recognise and explore the consequences of framing and counterframing on movement trajectories and outcomes. For instance, thematic analysis of the data shows how the SCTU gained significance and attracted media attention after it started attacking frontline leaders of, and the goals set by, local environmental movements. The revival of the trade union collective must therefore be conceived as a countermovement aimed at contesting the frames constructed by the green movement.

The trade union collective was revamped in a context where the local environmental movement accomplished positive movement outcomes[1] (success) in the form of institutional and judicial intervention to curb the effects of industrial pollution. This section identifies the major counterframing strategies and themes employed by the Standing Council to challenge the claims made by the local environmental movement. In conceiving the square-offs between unions and the green movement as a case of movement-countermovement (M/CM hereafter) interactions, this chapter argues that the union collective deploys the ideologies of nationalism and development in their counterframes in order to delegitimise, discredit and demobilise local green movements.

Countering movements and countering frames

Defined as attempts 'to rebut, or neutralize a person's or group's myths, versions of reality, or interpretive work' (Benford 1987, 75), counterframing entails the interpretive process of constructing disputing

frames by movements and countermovements. Such counterframes will enhance the efforts of the movement to attack, discredit or demobilise the opposition movement and thus create adverse consequences (Klandermans 1992). McCaffrey and Keys (2000, 42) observe that frame alignment helps in better understanding M-CM (movement-countermovement) dynamics, as 'the struggle over ideological supremacy' is central to this interaction. Examining the stand-off between the National Organization for Women (NOW) and anti-abortion movements, the authors identify three counterframing strategies used to respond to the ideological challenges of the opposition movement, namely, polarisation-vilification, frame saving and frame debunking (McCaffrey and Keys 2000).

Similar studies have focused on the description and exploration of counterframing strategies employed by social movements (Benford and Hunt 1994; Zuo and Benford 1995; Esacove 2004; Gallo-Cruz 2012). However, the 'competitive framing processes' in M-CM situations remain largely unexamined (Klandermans 1992), as observed by McCright and Dunlap (2000, 500), who noted that 'there is very little work on the framing processes of countermovements' – and that remains the case even now.

Among the existing studies, Zald and Useem's work stands out in offering a closer look at M-CM interactions, with a focus on the conditions that lead to M/CM interactions and extending over to its impacts on movement trajectories and outcomes. The authors explain that movements create the conditions necessary for the emergence and growth of countermovements, thereby providing the necessary impetus for their mobilisation (Zald and Useem 1983, 2). Defining countermovement as 'the mobilization of sentiments initiated to some degree in opposition to a movement', they conceive the M/CM relation as a 'loosely coupled conflict'. The main factors that the authors consider to be crucial for enabling the emergence of a countermovement include movement success, appropriate ideology, availability of resources and constraints and opportunities. Furthermore, the authors also explicate the strategic goals and tactics guiding M/CM interactions where they engage in a) damaging action, b) information gathering and c) efforts to produce a negative image to attack the opposition movement.

Other studies have also highlighted the ideological underpinnings of counterframing processes (see Zald and Useem 1987; McCright and Dunlap 2000; McCaffrey and Keys 2000; Rohlinger 2002). Zald and Useem (1987, 45) explain how counterframing efforts seek to create an 'ideological impact by discrediting leaders, creating an unpopular image

of movement goals and disseminating counterideologies'. McCaffrey and Keys (2000) highlight the importance of religious ideologies and values in counterframes by focusing on how the anti-abortion movement used frames rooted in religious ideologies, such as traditional family values and the sanctity of human life, to counter claims made by the abortion rights movement. Rohlinger (2002) further emphasises the role of ideology in movement frames by focusing on the media coverage received by the pro-life and pro-choice movements during crucial moments of the abortion debate in the US. However, none of the prevalent studies on movements and countermovements explore cases from the developing world, where the history of colonisation and the postcolonial architecture of the state and authority make the equation more problematic.

Drawing on the claims used, I examine how SCTU challenges the green movement by questioning the credibility of frontline leaders and the legitimacy of its goals. Relying on extant studies on M/CM interactions, I interpret these as the counterframing tactics used by SCTU to demobilise the local environmental movement. The major counterframing strategies identified include discrediting the leaders of the green movement, delegitimising the green movement by alleging connections with foreign organisations and damaging the credibility of its members by labelling them 'extremists'. Using the tags of 'pseudo-environmentalism', 'anti-nationalists' and 'imperial agents', the counterframes used by the Standing Council have undoubtedly damaged the reputation of the green movement, resulting in its decline.

'Pseudo environmentalism': discrediting the green movement and activists

One of the prominent counterframing strategies used by the trade unions to damage and discredit the environmental movement is to describe the actions of the greens as 'pseudo-environmentalism'. Such counterframes deployed by the Standing Council seek to denigrate the greens by creating a binary between real and faux environmentalists, then calling the local environmental activists the latter. In disparaging the green movement Mohammed, a local union leader, stated:

> Within Kerala, in general, there's a very conscious attempt to portray industries as an adversary and get listed as one among the state's nemesis. The pseudo-environmentalists, who claim to be environmental advocates and activists, have played a huge role in

> spreading such a narrative. It is very normal for industries to cause environmental pollution. The government has instituted PCB to prevent and regulate such pollution from industries and the board has been operating to curb environmental pollution. (Mohammed, union leader, personal interview, 4 June 2018)

The excerpt above illustrates the ways in which unions frame the actions of the local green movement as deliberate attempts to 'portray industries as an adversary'. By setting the green movements against the industries, the Standing Council argues that the principles of environmentalism guiding the local green movement are not genuine. Furthermore, the frames allege that the greens indulge in unfair targeting of industries 'that comply with all the guidelines put forward by the PCB'. Critiquing the green movement, a local union representative remarked that 'their strategy is simple … first they will call a goat a dog and then they will argue that this dog is a rabid dog, only to kill it' (SCTU 2012, 7).

In other words, the claims constructed by the union collective allege that the fake environmentalism guiding the greens victimises and maligns the industries. The counterframes strive to establish that the industries issued closure notices (including Sree Shakthi Paper Mills) are 'victims' of the pseudo-environmentalist practices adopted by the local environmental movement. Adopting a moderate approach, a senior trade union leader explicated that the unions are not against the environment per se, but that they oppose what he termed as 'environmental fundamentalism':

> See, the common man is suffering from pollution … the only thing they would want is an escape route or a solution that could stop pollution. Tapping on this sentiment, environmental fundamentalists are organizing these people, exploiting their fear and sufferings, and are then blackmailing the industries … Such environmental fundamentalists will leave the scene of protest soon as they receive money … the common man remains there, so does his problem with pollution. (Madhu, union leader, personal interview, 7 June 2018)

In sum, the counterframes vilify the green activists by depicting them as 'ungenuine and malevolent advocates' (Vanderford 1989, 166; McCaffrey and Keys 2000). McCaffrey and Keys (2000) term this strategy as 'vilification', in which a movement frames 'an adversary as

corrupt, hypocritical or a reprobate' so that the alleging movement can present itself as 'a moral agent fighting against evil' (McCaffrey and Keys 2000, 44).

'Funded activism': alleging foreign linkages

Highlighting the spurious nature of green activism, trade unions complain about the participation of frontline leaders of the environmental movement in international conferences, including those organised by international organisations such as the United Nations and International Labour Organization (ILO) (SCTU 2012). Levelling allegations of 'suspicious international linkages' against the frontline leaders of the green movement, Saleel observed that:

> Kumar had gone abroad to attend conferences like the ILO conference … and many other environmental conferences … Yes, he went to the Stockholm conference. In reality, these papers he presents at such conferences are against the Third World Countries … They are written in a way to help developed-capitalist countries as they oppose domestic industries and other local enterprises. These papers carry very negative arguments and campaign against our industries. His negative campaign is sponsored by international agencies such as Greenpeace. These people have certain agendas. (Saleel, union leader, personal interview, 12 May 2018)

The strategic representation of the stand-off between trade unions and environmental movements as a North-South issue is apparent in these narratives, in which the union member argues that the papers presented by the green leader are against the interests of 'Third World Countries'. Unions characterised these papers and participation as attempts to assist 'developed capitalist countries' in their destruction of domestic industries, alleging that these form part of a 'foreign agenda'. The frames have cleverly twisted the 'us' versus 'them' narrative constructed by the green movement; they are now 'othering' the environmentalists as 'outsiders', who align with foreign forces trying to dismantle the local economy and industries.

Such claims of suspicion are levelled against the environmental movement citing their connections with Greenpeace. This international Environmental Non-governmental Organisation (ENGO) was one of the

first organisations to step in and offer technical and scientific help to the local environmental movements, assisting them to assess the extent of the pollution. From its initial intervention onwards, Greenpeace has remained a central focus of the counterframes produced by the unions. In sharing his concerns about Greenpeace's role in creating schisms in the region, Krishnan, a union representative, commented:

> Greenpeace is deadlier than PMVS (*Periyar Malineekarana Virudha Samithi*), I would say. We must be wary of these international organisations. See they care less to agitate against the industries on the banks of the River Danube, a river into which almost all these industries open their discharge pipes … They will remain silent there, but will come here to fight against pollution and declare Eloor as a toxic hotspot. (Krishnan, union leader, personal interview, 30 May 2018)

Interestingly, the excerpt above accuses Greenpeace of unfairly focusing on the environmental issues in developing countries while refusing to intervene in the industrial pollution of River Danube. In 1999 Greenpeace declared Eloor as a toxic hotspot, a development that was – and has remained – a landmark event in the history of the local environmental movement. This tag helped to invest legitimacy into the claims of the local environmental movement, providing scientific evidence that reaffirmed the extent of, and the damage caused by, industrial pollution. Problematising the linkages to foreign organisations and participation in international conferences, the trade unions claim that the green movements received funds from such organisations. Explicating the foreign connections, Indran, a union leader, claimed that:

> These movements focus only on industries completely omitting all other causes because they are busy focusing on collecting funds from imperial and foreign organisations such as Greenpeace, Ford Foundation etc. to destroy industries in our country.

He further argued that the mobilisation of the greens is based on 'faulty reports' prepared by Western organisations that are 'banned for engaging in anti-national activities', and hence declared these actions to be 'anti-national'.

The trade union collective draws heavily from the existing political frames that have been historically used by the state's communist movement. Frames opposing the 'imperialist agenda' and 'capitalist

domination' have gained traction and resonate well with the people in Kerala, particularly among affiliates of the Communist Party (CPM and CPI). By representing the members of the environmental movement as 'traitors' using 'foreign fund' or 'spies of the empire', the unions thus strategise their counterframes so as to garner the attention of those left-wing constituents who continue to fear Western intervention and its potential to derail the domestic communist movement. In response to the allegations regarding foreign linkages, a booklet published by PMVS stated:

> Unions label our members as 'agents of the empire' and allege that we resort to 'imperial spy work', implementing 'a conspiracy to dismantle domestic industries' and call us anti-nationals. Our organisation has always stood by the oppressed and marginalised people in society and to attach such labels to our activism is disheartening. Time alone can tell on which side they are standing. The people who unleash such campaigns should remember that we were part of the anti-privatisation movements organized in many industrial units including F.A.C.T. (PMVS 2012)

Reiterating its commitment to the struggles of people at the margin, the excerpt expresses the dismay of environmentalists over the negative frames that question the green movements' allegiance to egalitarian and anti-capitalist principles. Citing an exemplar, in which the greens stood by the unions and factory workers in order to resist the move to privatise public sector enterprises, the environmental movement seeks to demonstrate its continued solidarity to an anti-capitalist ethos. In this situation the green movement strives hard to depict itself as a movement not inspired by imperial agendas, but rather guided by the politics of emancipation.

Apparent in these frames are the ideological disputes surrounding the political economy of development in Kerala, where the two movements compete to secure a position in the state's long legacy of emancipatory movements. Invoking the nationalist rhetoric, the Standing Council engages in the active pursuit, seeking to depict the greens as committing treason by working against the interest of the nation. The counterframes and frames also elucidate the interactive nature of framing processes, in which the frames evolve in a dialectic manner.

'Their campaign is based on fearmongering': denying the effects of pollution

The Standing Council alleges that the green movements spread fear about pollution, then tap on this fear to mobilise people to fight against industries. The narratives argue that the greens adopt a tactic of 'fear-mongering' to garner adherents' support for their movement, and thus accuse them of moral relegation for exploiting local people's emotions and sentiments. In the context of the framing and counterframing disputes between the two movements, scientific studies and findings are not exempt from debate. The disputes between the two movements have challenged the 'objectivity' of scientific facts by subjecting the findings of the same study to divergent interpretations.

According to the Standing Council, the local environmental movements exaggerated the effects of pollution using the frame of 'scientific facts' on pollution. One of the prominent counterframing strategies adopted by the union collective was to co-opt this frame of 'objective scientific facts'. Attempting to downplay the effects of pollution, the union collective argued that the results of scientific studies cited by the environmentalists are biased. Tying this argument to other national organisations that frame scientific studies critical of chemical industries and pesticides as 'biased analysis', the Standing Council expressed its concern regarding the veracity of scientific evidence used by the green movement.

For example, the findings of a follow-up study conducted by Greenpeace (2003) comparing the health condition of the people in Eloor with a reference group in a nearby Panchayath, Pindimana,[2] received competing and contradictory interpretations from the two movements. The environmentalists had used this survey to highlight the higher incidence of many chronic diseases, including cancer, among the people living in the industrial region, in comparison to the reference group (Gopinath 2012). However, the unions maintain a very different argument and perspective and pertaining to this study and its findings. In the words of Imtiaz, the Secretary of Standing Council:

> One of the prominent slogans used to garner attention was 'The alarming surge in the number of cancer patients in Eloor'. This title was soon taken up by most media houses and news dailies … In fact, we had to write an article to counter this claim as such biased news and faulty claims are adversely affecting the people here … the workers and their families… They spread fear among

> people by claiming that the consumption of polluted water caused kidney ailments in around 13,600 people in this region. What they have actually done is this: they have blown up the number of dialysis done by 257 kidney patients in this region. Earlier they had claimed that the number of cancer patients is increasing in this region. However, a comparative study conducted between Eloor and Pindimana, a panchayath with no industries, found that the number of cancer patients is higher in Pindimana. (Imtiaz, union leader, personal interview, 5 June 2018)

According to the Standing Council, the green movements overestimate the number of people with chronic ailments. The excerpt also argues that the comparative survey finds a higher incidence of cancer in Pindimana when compared to Eloor. Nevertheless, the study and findings receive a different interpretation in the campaign materials produced by PMVS. According to Kumar, the leader of PMVS, the findings of this study can be summarised as follows:

> The study basically looked into the health impacts of pollution among the people in Eloor by focusing on nine wards. The study was conducted by doing a comparative study by taking another Panchayath called Pindimana in Kothamangalam as the control population … In that study, people in Eloor were found to be 1.5–10 per cent more prone to around 18 diseases, including asthma, allergy, renal failure, bone-related and muscle-related ailments, heart diseases, illness related to the reproductive system and cancer, when compared to the control population in Pindimana. The follow-up study conducted in Eloor also found that the level of pollution went up in 2003 when compared to the level in 1999. (Kumar, founding member and Research Coordinator of PMVS, 26 May 2018)

Though the incidence of cancer has been a major issue highlighted in the campaigns organised by the green movement, it does not make it into the list of diseases considered in connection to this particular study. The differential interpretations of the results from the same scientific survey elucidate the ways in which the framing and counterframing processes debate research in natural science disciplines, built on objectivity, validity and scientific realism (Moses and Knutsen 2012). In other words, the contesting frames between unions and green movements adopt the 'scientific frame' so as to garner the legitimacy and acceptance received

by science. The epistemological and ontological principles of science rule out the possibility of many interpretations and many realities. Yet ironically the two movement groups trying to establish alternative versions of reality use 'science' to bring legitimacy to their respective versions.

To counter the claims surrounding the toxic nature of the products manufactured by local industries, the unions also rely on the singular lived experience of workers employed in these units of production. Following the Endosulphan pesticide disaster in Kasaragod, the local environmental movement in Eloor had raised concerns about manufacturing the pesticide Endosulfan – an organochlorine and a Persistent Organic Pollutant (POPs) – in the plants owned by Hindustan Insecticides Limited (HIL). As a result of continued resistance movements and a judicial intervention banning the use of the pesticide, HIL's Endosulphan plant was ordered to close down. However, the unions are not yet convinced about the claims surrounding the toxicity of Endosulfan. Explaining their stand, Ramachandran, a trade union leader, set out the case as follows:

> HIL has shut down the plant manufacturing Endosulphan following a Supreme Court order. The people who worked there became jobless, that's all … I am still the President of our union in HIL and have known many brilliant and healthy people who worked here. For example, K.C. Yesudasan, he was a champion in the 100-metre race at the National Games. If Endosulphan is as problematic as these people claim, then it should affect the workers as well, right? So these are nothing but allegations that people spread outside. Again, like our veteran leader said, 'the dose makes the poison' … but that does not prevent us from taking medicines, you see … and that's the logic. (Ramachandran, union leader, personal interview, 3 July 2018)

The strategy to present denial as logical is ingrained in the frames constructed by the unions. Examples of healthy factory workers are used here to deny the claims and scientific evidence about Endosulfan's toxicity and hazardous nature. A careful analysis of the union newsletter uncovers the repeated labelling of the frames used by the greens as 'illogical'; this is substantiated by their argument that the claims raised by environmentalists 'defy all principles of reasoning and logic'. This tendency to demean and denigrate the green activists as illogical remains a dominant strategy used by the Standing Council in its frames.

'Horse with Blinkers': blaming myopic focus

In attacking the green movement for their narrow focus on the environment, Indran, the leader of the Standing Council, compared it to a 'horse with blinkers'. By this he means that the politics of the unions consider not just the environment; they also adopt a comprehensive approach towards understanding the economic necessities of both workers and industries. In differentiating the stand taken by the two movement groups, he observed:

> Trade unions must stand for and protect workers' wages, bonuses etc. When an industry complains about a crisis there may be some organisations willing to negotiate for a lower wage. But we stand for the workers, we don't settle for any wage reductions … so, in such a context, it will be difficult for us to prioritise these issues [environmental concerns]. We have certain limitations. You can record this and write that I have said because we have those limitations. Priority … I mean, we have to prioritise. Environmental organisations can function like a horse with blinkers. We cannot do that. They don't worry about any of these matters … Should we protect the jobs of workers? How would their families survive? They are not bothered by this. All they are worried about is the environment. How many families depend on these industries for their survival? (Indran, union leader, personal interview, 18 June 2018)

Reviving the jobs vs. the environment frame discussed in the section on ideological disputes (p.148), trade unions call out the greens for their 'parochial activism' centred only around environmental issues. 'It is impossible to move forward if we think only about the environment,' commented Nelson, a union representative, in reference to the campaign run by the environmentalists. In other words, the counterframing cleverly accuses the greens of prioritising environmental matters over issues that affect the workers' interests.

As illustrated by these excerpts, the unions claim that as an organisation representing the interests of workers, unions are forced to prioritise workers' issues. Importantly, this debate also sheds light on the limits imposed on unions by industrial capitalism (Gorz 1980), which forces unions to make a choice between workers' welfare or environmental protection. The counterframes produced by the unions accuse the greens of an exclusive focus on the environment, to the complete exclusion of worker issues.

In addition to causing an ideological impact on the audience (Zald and Useem 1987), the Standing Council deploys a strategy of polarisation by creating a dichotomy between 'us' versus 'them' (Gamson et al. 1992; Ryan 1991; Steuter 1992). Consequently, by vilifying members of the local environmental movement and by separating the unions from the greens, citing moral grounds, the Standing Council adopts a counter-framing strategy of 'polarisation-vilification' to respond to the ideological challenges posed by the green movement (McCaffrey and Keys 2000).

Suspecting the motives

Questioning the motives of the environmental movement, the unions also allege that the greens walk away from almost every proposal to revamp the river or ameliorate the effects of pollution. A union representative remarked, 'They don't want solutions, all they want are problems … The issue of pollution justifies their existence and for that reason, they want the issue to remain unresolved, forever'. Inquiring about the possible course of action to ameliorate the tensions between the two movements, trade union leaders repeatedly pointed out that the stalemate is caused by the greens' refusal to accept any solutions – adding that they 'suspect the presence of secret groups to orchestrate pollution along the stretch of the river that flows through the industrial region'. Imtiaz illustrated this further by recollecting how environmentalists had opposed a plan proposed by a local self-government (LSG) body to clean-up the Kuzhikandam stream (*thodu*):[3]

> Let me give you an example … The Eloor Municipal Panchayat decided to clean the Kuzhikkandam *thodu* (stream) … These people (PMVS) blocked this move … they said this cannot be done. They allege that the move to clean this *thodu* is to help the industries. Because if the *thodu* is cleaned, then it will fetch a good certificate for the industries. So this cannot be cleaned, they said. My wife then was the Panchayat President (she is the Chairperson now). She, after extensive consultation with all of us, sought contribution from each industry … also the Panchayat offered funds worth of Rs.5 lakhs ($7,161). The environmentalists opposed this … one, they said that 'the 5 lakhs allotted from the Panchayat is the taxpayer's money … it's from the government treasury and that should not be spent on behalf of the industry … Instead, by following the "polluter pays principle", the industries must bear the

> cost of cleaning up the *thodu* (stream)'. That's their demand … See, all these are mere technical issues … It doesn't matter who cleans, the point is someone should clean. (Imtiaz, union leader, personal interview, 5 June 2018)

The Standing Council questions the commitment of the green movement towards finding solutions to the problems. Citing incidents like the one quoted above, unions actively try to challenge the sincerity of the green movement's goals and the agendas it sets forth. However, such counter-frames receive strong responses and opposition from environmentalists. In Kerala the local environmental movement systematically exposes the apparent fallacy underlying claims made by the unions (discussed above), citing court orders and scientific reports published by central and state authorities.

Kumar, the research coordinator of PMVS, vividly explains their approach to resolving the issue of pollution. He points out the issues they have identified with the plan proposed by the Municipality. The greens explicate how a clean-up proposal worth a few lakhs will not help to revamp the river, nor will it resolve the issue of pollution that has accumulated on the river bed over the years. The National Green Tribunal was recently ordered to create a clean-up fund worth 26 crores (approximately $3.9 million) to revamp and remediate Kuzhikandam *thodu*. Kumar broke down the plan as follows:

> Following the report from the German Technical Corporation and as a result of the constant request from our side, the National Green Tribunal directed to form a DPR (Detailed Project Report). The DPR assessed the initial amount to be 26 crores ($3.9 million). Ten crores ($1.5 million) should be spent by the central government and 16 crores ($2.4 million) from the state government for the remediation plans and should call international tender. Such studies confirm, accept and legitimise what we have been asking for over these years. In fact, everyone has accepted that issues in Kuzhikkandam Thodu are real … The government itself has accepted that the issues we have been raising are real … and that happened because these studies are factual and accurate. (Kumar, Research Coordinator PMVS, personal interview, 26 May 2018)

These back-and-forth arguments between the unions and the green organisations serve to illustrate the tension prevailing in their understanding of the problem as well as the proposed solutions. The plan

adjudicated by the National Green Tribunal also requires polluting companies to contribute towards the clean-up fund detailed above. In other words, in addition to remediating pollution, the solution proposed by the judiciary reaffirms the industries' culpability. When the unions adopt a managerial approach to 'fixing' the issue of pollution, environmentalists seek, through their framings and actions, to introduce scientific solutions in order to reaffirm the industries' culpability and ensure sustainable regeneration of the local environment.

Gathering 'dirt' on the green movement

One of the most damaging counterframing strategies deployed by the Standing Council has been to gather malicious information on frontline leaders of the green movement. This was mainly intended to construct frames that would delegitimise actions of the environmental movement by alleging that its members received bribes for mobilising against industries. The union started intensive smear campaigns against the green movement, making use of such information. In summing up the results of one such surveillance programme Krishnan, a senior trade union leader, remarked:

> If we investigate these environmentalists, it becomes clear that they are doing such activism to serve some other individuals or interests. There are many allegations against these people. The people who led this movement were not very rich, but they have managed to secure resorts in places like Wayanad and own plantations. Their assets are increasing at exponential rates. How is that possible since these people hardly work? This proves to us that huge monopoly corporate powers are behind them, and it is important to investigate the financial sources further. In our examination of such sources, it also appeared that they are taking an anti-national stand. It is anti-national/treacherous to destroy domestic industries to serve the interests of international monopolies. They are misinforming and fearmongering people. (Krishnan, union leader, personal interview, 30 May 2018)

In revealing information about the surveillance programme put in place to gather inside stories on the environmental movement's leaders, Ramachandran explained the constant vigil with which he monitored social media handles and other activities of the green activists to obtain

some 'dirty' information. During an interview session, Ramachandran revealed that his wait became successful when he found some suspicious images 'liked' by Kumar on Facebook. These images included photographs that insulted the Indian National flag and disgraced the nation. Narrating this investigation, he exclaimed:

> See, this allegation stemmed when Kumar was unleashing attacks against us in international platforms. I mean, he was becoming so smart by attacking the unions and the industries …That obviously disturbed us, so we started to look into their motives and found some things. This was one among those. I found an image on his Facebook page that disrespected our national flag. The image also tagged someone else named Muhammed Ali or something, he was wearing a cap. So I took this image to the Panchayath President to inquire about the issue … And they laughingly said 'Who is this Muhammed Ali…? He may be an Iraqi or Saudi Arabian?' So we thought of reporting this to the police. (Ramachandran, union leader, personal interview, 3 July 2018)

The excerpt above demonstrates the underlying tones of Islamophobia that led the individuals featured in this scenario to the conclusion that a Muslim name would inevitably imply connections to Iraq or Saudi Arabia. It also explicates the 'othering' experienced by Muslims in their own country, where they have to prove their allegiance to nation and nationalism by going the extra mile. Two major allegations formed part of the unions' frames as a result of these 'investigations': 1) land owned by the members of the green movement and LAEC (Local Area Environmental Committee) in Wayanad and 2) the sharing of anti-national content on social media handles. During the interview Padmanabhan sounded extremely proud about leading these surveillance programmes on behalf of the union collective. He claimed that these smear campaigns proved 'the most successful in discrediting and demobilising the environmental movement'.

However, soon after they started framing Kumar into this label of 'committing anti-national actions', the union leader realised that the images were not posted by Kumar or Mohammed, but were in fact a technical glitch. (This is explained in detail in a book written in 2013 by Ashkar Khader.) Explaining the scenario, Padmanabhan remarked:

> Pressure started building up and SCTU decided to report this to the police … We filed a complaint to the Chief Minister, which led to

> an inquiry by the Vigilance and then Crime Branch … As this was progressing, an employee from FACT called me and complained, 'Hey Comrade, why are you implicating us in this issue? You are putting our own in trouble now!' I did not quite understand at first. I asked him to tell me more about the incident. He continued, 'Don't you remember my nephew, Muhammed Ali, who was a member of DYFI (Democratic Youth Federation of India, the youth wing of CPIM)? He is in the Gulf now. The police are constantly visiting his ailing mother to inquire about him'. We did not recognise him. He was wearing a cap and all, so we thought he is an Iraqi or something. He informed me that he did not post the image. See, that's the problem with social media, right. We should be careful about what gets on our profiles. (Padmanabhan, union leader and Convener of the SCTU, 27 May 2018)

Despite knowing the truth, the unions decided to move forward with the plan to make these allegations part of their campaign. Huge billboards were erected to carry this allegation connected to the purchase of land and the posting of anti-national content. The narrative clearly uncovers the ruthless strategies deployed by the unions to damage the green movement, bringing its agendas under suspicion by discrediting their credentials as citizens and activists.

The unions here are deploying the frame of nationalism – a master frame (Snow and Benford 1992) used to attack and repress all dissident voices and movements against the status quo, including the state itself. In fact, many of the counterframes employed by the unions are part of a larger lexicon of repression used on movements that challenge the centres of power. Such master frames strive to portray these movements in a negative shade by calling them 'anti-national', 'Maoists', 'extremists' and 'anti-developmentalist'. Many of the environmental movements and other progressive social movements organised from the margins are repressed, delegitimised and demobilised by these grandiose frames. Given the draconian laws prevailing against offences pertaining to treason and terrorist activities, such frames help countermovements easily to demobilise green movements by intimidating adherents and bystanders.

In other words, the counterframing attacks faced by the green movement in Eloor are not an isolated incident – neither are these frames. These frames form part of the dominant master frames adopted by centres of power across the globe to dismantle grassroots movements that challenge the business-as-usual model implemented by the status

quo. When asked about the allegations raised against him in particular and the green movement in general, Kumar, the leader of PMVS who bore the brunt of most of these allegations, responded as follows:

> If they are making up all these allegations to demobilise our movement, then that will remain as their dream forever. For us, the fight against pollution is a fight for our right to live. We will move forward with this protest so long as the emotions of a layman, whose water, air and land are polluted and who battles with diseases, kindle our hearts and burn our souls. It is our aim to have a river that flows clear, to have air that's clean to breathe and water that's not poisoned. Kumar, founding member and Research Coordinator of PMVS, 26 May 2018)

The above incident demonstrates the personal and biographical consequences of these counterframing strategies.[4] In addition to discrediting and demobilising the green movement, these frames spiralled further into police cases, serving to that stigmatise and victimise members of the green movement for crimes they did not commit. The exchange between unions and the green movements presented above illustrates the nature of movement-countermovement interactions between the two movements, in which skilful strategies used by the unions compromised the green movement's credibility and legitimacy. The counterframing strategies had profound consequences for members of the green movements.

Discussion and conclusion

The counterframes used by the unions against the green movement are not singular collective action frames, operating only in the context of the battles between the two movements in Eloor. Rather these are generic frames, used across the world to repress, attack and delegitimise movements that challenge the status quo, especially when these are organised by people from the margins.

The frames used by the Standing Council to discredit and demobilise the environmental movements are widely used by trade unions and state mechanisms. Such frames serve to counter claims raised by grassroots environmental movements as they fight against the negative results of pollution. In other words, these countermovements form part of a cluster of movement groups which work towards demobilising other movements, specifically those organised to resist

the pursuit of development projects that do not consider the adverse impacts imposed by such projects on poor and marginalised people. The frames adopted by this 'cluster' (Snow and Benford 1992) of countermovements aimed at discrediting 'people's movements' (*Janakeeya Samarangal*, a struggle organised by the people) are strikingly similar. They are constructed from a generic template that weaves the frames around the rhetoric of nationalism and portrays the dissenters as 'terrorists' and 'extremists'.

It is thus possible to identify 'master frames' that extend beyond the specific context in the Eloor-Edayar region of Kerala, guiding the framing and counterframing processes (Benford 2013). Kumar, a victim of many such smear campaigns by the trade unions, explains this as follows:

> The plundering of natural resources and environmental pollution is happening across the state of Kerala. The people who protest against these activities are being framed in police cases and labeled as terrorists and foreign agents. To engage in such slander against people who fight injustice is fascism. Such trends will continue to face strong opposition from the people's movement. (Kumar, founding member of PMVS and Research Coordinator, personal interview, 5 May 2018)

The aim here is to stigmatise members of these opposition movements (organisations that oppose the centres of power and business as usual models of development). In other words, these countermovements form part of a cycle of protest, in which a proliferation of grassroots environmental movements has seen a concomitant surge in countermobilisation practices that seek to repress and eliminate such dissenting voices from the movement field and political landscape of the state. This countermobilisation cluster is led mostly by trade unions and state machinery, including the police forces and other correctional mechanisms under the aegis of the state.

The attacks against the protestors in Puthuvype Island (fighting against a proposed LPG [Liquid Petroleum Gas] plant by Indian Oil Corporation) and Keezhattoor, led by the *Vayak Kilikal* ('Farm Birds', protesting against the filling up of wetlands and paddy fields for road construction), stand as testimony to the generic adoption of collective action frames to discredit social movements. The Puthuvype protest was repressed by using police intimidation; many of the protestors, including children, were brutally beaten by police officers. To justify its the use of violence, the government alleged that the protest was 'infiltrated'

and backed by 'forces with extremist nature' (Outlook India 2017; PTI 2017). The Keezhattoor movement faced similar opposition from both the state and the local Communist Party leadership, where the forces of countermobilisation alleged that the resistance movement was backed by 'Maoists'. A Minister admonished the protestors by calling them 'anti-developmentalists' and argued in the State legislatures that the movement should be called 'vultures hovering over the paddy fields' instead of 'Farm Birds' (Ameerudheen 2018; Mathew 2018; Paul 2018).

A striking congruence between the frames used to attack these protests and the frames used by trade unions against the green movement in Eloor reveals the presence of a generic template from which these countermovements draw their frames. In a way, these particular 'master' frames are selected as they 'are culturally resonant to their historical milieu' (Swart 1995, 619). The popularity of the neoliberal model of development and the increased traction of nationalist rhetoric (Adnan 2015; Anand 2019; Chatterji et al. 2019; Desai 2016) make these themes the most efficient choices to attack and demobilise movements.

Notes

1 Mottl (1980) and Zald and Useem (1987) explain how countermovement emerges as a response to the success achieved by the opposing movement.
2 Pindimana is a nearby Panchayath that matched the socio-demographic and geographic characteristics of Eloor.
3 *Thodu* is the Malayalam word used to describe streams. The original word is retained instead of a translation as 'Kuzhikkandam thodu' is a term that assumes a significant role in the movement frames and litigations.
4 This is discussed in Chapter 6, where I set out in detail the adverse consequences and victimisation sustained by members of the green movement. Many of these counterframes were later filed as police cases and used to hunt down environmental activists using the machinery of the state. Frontline leaders were victimised and stigmatised by the continuous circulation of allegations, later proved incorrect by police inquiries. However, these negative claims had an impact in derailing the image of the movement and its members, as it eroded the leaders' credibility in front of the public.

8
Discussion and conclusion

In this chapter I offer a summary of the major findings discussed in previous chapters. In addition I point out the implications of this study for social movement theory and research, identify the limitations of this book and delineate areas for future research.

Chapter summary

In this study I have examined a case involving labour-environmental conflicts over an issue of industrial pollution in the Eloor-Edayar industrial belt in Kerala, a state in South India. The main purpose of this analysis is to understand the factors that produce conflicts between trade unions and environmental movements in situations where both of these movements are driven by working-class participants. Such an inquiry assumes importance in a context where cases of labour-environmental conflicts (or coalitions) from the Global South are largely absent from mainstream literature; in the process of carrying it out, the inquiry thus contributes to the field of Environmental Labour Studies. Furthermore, the singular conception of labour-environmental conflict as a class-based issue, polarised between working-class labour movements and middle-class environmental organisations, has gained traction in India among institutionalised trade unions and left-wing political parties. The findings of this project clearly identify the need to consider labour-environmental conflicts within the wider backdrop of the political economy of development, industrial capitalism and the nexus between trade unions, industries and the state.

My primary goal in this project was to explore labour-environmental conflicts by focusing on two aspects: firstly, the structural and individual

factors that create a conflictual relationship and secondly the framing processes and frame-disputes that arise between the two movement groups. Relying on an analysis of movement frames and individual movement actors' interpretations, I examined how structural and individual factors intersect to determine the relationship between labour and environmental movements in preceding chapters.

In Chapter 2 I set out the methodological approach adopted in this study and explicated the advantages ingrained in using a combination of extended case method (Burawoy 1998; 2019) and constructionist approaches (Charmaz 2014) to ethnographic research and data analysis. Since the questions guiding this inquiry operate at the intersection of structure and agency, a combination of these two approaches to ethnography proved beneficial in uncovering the dialectical relationship between these two levels of analysis. In addition, the discussions presented here point towards the omission of postcolonial social movements and settings within the mainstream literature on social movements. Attempting to re-centre the focus of this inquiry on postcolonial movement and actors, the practice of ethnographic inquiry in this research reflected upon the colonial roots of the methods and the issue of power differentials and the influence of my positionality.

Furthermore, I debated my positionality as both an insider and outsider in the research setting, considering the possible implications of this hybrid status on the data collection processes and analysis. Chapter 2 also assessed the ramifications of researching left-wing movements from a critical standpoint – for example, considering the emergent Hindutva onslaught on the rights of marginalised people in India, while also problematising the idea of interpreting or confining states that have left-wing governments within broad-based strokes of 'hopes'. I challenge such monolithic narratives surrounding the state of Kerala by uncovering how left-wing state and parties in fact lean to the political right on matters related to economic growth, development and the environment.

A brief overview of the history of industrialisation in the Eloor-Edayar industrial belt is provided in Chapter 3. It explores how members of trade unions and the green movement reminisced about the arrival of industries and the concomitant changes that occurred in the environment. The analysis underscored that emergence of the local environmental movement could be interpreted as a response to the environmental grievances and subsequent 'disruption of the quotidian' engendered by the industrialisation process. The narratives considered here reiterate the limited[1] but continued relevance of structural strain and breakdown theories in explaining the conditions that lead to the

emergence of collective action (Buechler 2004; Snow et al. 1998). The discussions portrayed how the two movement groups were in agreement while discussing the initial period of industrial pollution, but then drifted to the poles while discussing the issue of pollution in the present. As well as movement emergence, this chapter also traced shifting political opportunities and mapped the timeline and trajectory of the local environmental movement.

In Chapter 4 I pursued the first aspect, the influence of structural and political-economic factors upon both the social movement mobilisation processes and labour-environmental relations. Tracing the myriad ways in which capitalism influences the mobilisation processes of trade unions and green organisations in the region, Chapter 4 reaffirmed the need to bring capitalism back to the centre of social movement studies. In so doing it sheds light upon the varied tactics and strategies used by local industries in order to infiltrate the movement landscape and influence the mobilisation processes. The long-standing presence of anti-capitalist frames in the protest lexicons of the local environmental movement revealed how the absence of capitalism from movement research can also be understood in terms of the near-complete omission of postcolonial social movements. Interviews highlighted the possible co-optation of institutionalised unions by the industries and the impact of capital upon the movement field through 'paid protests'.

Significantly, the data traced a model of 'crony capitalism' operating in the region, characterised by a strong nexus between the local industries, unions and the state. Resembling a form of hegemonic alliance, the state, capitalists and trade unions work in tandem to curb local action against pollution. Drawing on the strong contrast between the resource mobilisation potential of unions and the local environmental movement, this chapter problematises traditional resource mobilisation theories by highlighting how the monopoly over resources or 'capital', together with access to power, provide unfair advantages to capitalists in the movement landscape.

In Chapter 5 I explored the 'why' question that surrounds the conflicts between labour and green movements. This chapter examined the reasons that create schisms between organised labour and environmental movements, both progressive social movements that are ostensibly composed of working-class participants. Chapter 5 adopted a two-pronged approach to answering this question: firstly, it problematised the homogenous conception of workers and working-class based on economic interests and secondly, it deciphered the shift in labour politics in Kerala and considered its implications for labour's

relationship with other social movements in the state. Highlighting the heterogeneity of working-class interests, Chapter 5 probed why the attribution of generalised interests and politics over working-class groups is problematic, given that the interests of different workers are often contingent upon the sector in which they are employed and on the resource dependency of such vocations.

Distinguishing between an inclusive and exclusive conception of the working class, this chapter uncovered the differential interpretations of class, class consciousness and solidarity within these two movement groups. In doing so, I bring forth the divergent conceptions of class that underlie trade unions and green movements, considering how these manifest in their relationship with one another and with local industries. Furthermore, the chapter demonstrated how the 'class compromise' between labour and capital plays a very significant role in accentuating the conflicts between labour and green movements.

By exposing the 'illusion of homogeneity' that prevails among the circles of working-class and left-wing politics in Kerala, the chapter also raised pertinent questions about the relationship between left-wing politics, environment and development in the state. In addition, the findings in this chapter establish the need to undertake future research into the shift in left-wing politics, as a result of which the left leans more to the 'right' on matters related to economic development. By embellishing the working-class origins and left-wing politics of the local environmental movement, this chapter played an instrumental role in relabelling the conflicts between labour and environmental movement, moving from 'red-green conflicts' to 'red-red conflicts'.

In Chapter 6 I explored the interpretive aspects of the conflicts between labour and the green movements. Focusing on the opposing and competing frames constructed by the two movement groups around the issue of pollution, this chapter demonstrated how structural factors and varied ideologies of development influence the micro-mobilisation processes of social movements. The focus in this chapter, quite different from that in Chapters 4 and 5, was upon the construction of meanings and interpretations that surround the issue of pollution. Chapter 6 sought to explain labour-environmental conflicts as a conflict between ideas and realities, in which the movements engage in an ontological dispute regarding the existence of industrial pollution and the industries' role in engendering the same. The analysis of movement frames unravelled the opposing realities constructed by the two movement groups. In so doing it underscored the processes through which movement actors engage in reality construction, and the implications of the same.

One of the most interesting aspects of the discussion surrounding frames and frame-disputes was the role of ideologies. The discussions in Chapter 6 explained how the disputes in frames could also be explicated as a dispute in ideology concerning the issues of environment, development and economic growth. The chapter deciphered how the trade union collective fits the definition of countermovement and analysed the counterframes. Detailed analysis of the frames is used to explicate how the trade union collective sought to discredit, delegitimise and demobilise local environmental movements using varied counterframing tactics; these involved labelling frontline leaders of the green movement as 'pseudo-environmentalists', 'anti-nationalists', 'anti-developmentalists' and 'extremists'.

In sum, this book attempts to explain the conflict between labour and environmental movements in terms of a complex web of socio-economic processes. Within these, the political economy of development, logic of capitalist production and the 'hegemonic coalition' between industries, state and trade unions play a decisive role. A cogent effort has been made to understand the factors, structural as well as interpretive, that create and sustain tensions between the two movements. That is, instead of stepping on to the slippery slope of recommendations to amend the gap, the book lays bare the complexities within which the two movements are partially tied in a way that prohibits the possibility of mending. They are both stuck in their respective terrains, so to speak.

To use a metaphor, the powerful presence of structural factors, the limits to elevating working class as a unifying identity and the nexus between trade unions, state and industries force one to imagine throwing out the baby as well as the bath water when it comes to possibilities surrounding coalition. That may be a limitation of this work too. The tensions between trade unions and the PMVS must then be considered against the larger backdrop of tendencies towards 'crony capitalism' that engulf Kerala's economic landscape, constraining and crushing the possibilities of democratic dissent against social, economic and environmental inequalities engendered by so-called 'development' initiatives.

Implications for social movement theory and research

This study started as an inquiry into the factors that produce conflicts between labour and environmental movements in situations where working-class participants comprise both these movements. Considering the singular conception of labour-environmental conflicts as a class issue

in the extant literature, this analysis embarked on a journey by reconceptualising 'blue-green conflicts' as 'red-green conflicts', taking into account the left-wing allegiance of the trade union collective in question. However, as the research progressed, 'red-green' became reconceptualised into 'red-red' conflicts, reflecting the working-class and Marxist orientations of the local environmental movement.

This investigation thus traverses an eventful world of movement fields, actors and interpretations. It has yielded several original findings and insights with long-standing consequences to the study of labour-environmental relations, social movement theory and research. The findings engage with, and make contributions to, the fields of social movements, environmental labour studies, just transition and informal workers, social history, development studies, labour studies and postcolonial sociology. Furthermore, this study has set out on a journey to understand class and its formations by looking simultaneously at economic interests and framings – an exercise that seeks to understand the structural situatedness of meanings and interpretations and vice versa.

The case of labour-environmental conflicts explored in this chapter and the resultant findings make contributions to the field of Environmental Labour Studies, in particular establishing the need to address environmental grievances without compromising workers' rights and welfare (Räthzel, Stevis and Uzzell 2021). The present study thus aspires to be part of a new trajectory of research exploring labour-environmental relations in countries in the Global South. This research aims to tap into the micro-operations of capitalist logics and their manifestation on social movements.

The present study also challenges mainstream literature on labour-environmental conflicts by problematising the singular conception of environmentalism as a middle-class phenomenon. By highlighting the working-class and leftist affiliations of the local environmental movement, it also emphasises the importance of considering environmentalism as a class issue – one in which inequalities often fall heavily on those lower down the social ladder. In showcasing the heterogeneity of workers and working-class interests, such explorations serve to challenge singular and homogenous definitions of 'working class' as a category. They thus expand the boundaries of labour studies to encompass the diversity of workers and class-based interests.

Discussions around the continued importance of capitalism and class in the social movement research presented in this study assume greater importance when we consider the exclusion of postcolonial

movements and movement actors from mainstream literature. The dismissal of class from movement research can be directly attributed to the omission of movement experiences and actors in the Global South. Using the example of Kerala, a state with a unique history of working-class movements and public action, the study exposes the problematics of generative class-based analysis, even as it reaffirms the continued relevance of class in understanding social movement mobilisation and participation. As a result, the findings of this study contribute to the emergent literature within movement studies that seek to bring capitalism and class to the centre of movement analysis (Della Porta 2015, 2017; Hetland and Goodwin 2013).

Furthermore, this study contributes to these ongoing discussions by presenting an empirical case study from a postcolonial setting that establishes the historical and continued influence of capitalism on social movement mobilisation. In addition, it critiques traditional resource mobilisation theories (RMT) by underscoring structural inequalities in the distribution and access to resources (Piven and Cloward 1991; Ferree 1992). The study also reveals the need for future research to uncover the motives behind movement participation, and the ways in which this complicates understandings of rationality and social context.

Labour, Nature and Capitalism also relies on a historical sociological/social history lens to untangle the strong interface between economic and social phenomena that happened over a period in the region. That is, by delving deeper into the history of local industrialisation and its ramifications on the local ecology and people's everyday lives, or by tracing the past and present of the local environmental movement, this book underscores the need for an interdisciplinary approach: one that focuses on the puzzle and then generously borrows ideas, concepts and methods from across social science disciplines to help solve it. It may appear more as an 'imagination' (Mills 1959) that helps carefully to look at and understand the intersection of, say, any of the following: personal troubles and public issues, history and biography, social structure and individual agency, economy and society. In doing so, the present work hopes to open future paths of inquiries into the possibilities of constructing theories from below – theories that seek to capture structural exploitation without losing focus on the interpretive world of individuals.

Methodologically the study undertook a hybrid approach to ethnography, in which the theory and practice of ethnography were informed by the extended case method and constructionist grounded theory. The risk involved in combining the domain assumptions

underlying these approaches is outweighed by the benefits accrued to this project through the simultaneous explorations of movement events at both micro and macro level. Moreover, a research question that is situated on a theoretical framework rooted in both political economy and frame analysis demands a hybrid methodology – one able to examine the interaction between political-economic factors and micro-mobilisation processes.

Furthermore, such an approach allows researchers to undertake inquiries that simultaneously examine structure and agency or, in Habermasian terms, the 'system' and the 'social' (Bhambra 2016; Habermas 1988). Given the complex social and political-economic structure faced by postcolonial movements and movement actors, inquiries that consider only the system or the social may fall short in offering a comprehensive understanding of the socio-environmental problem or uncover only limited explanations. The findings of this study thus facilitate an expansion of the literature on postcolonial sociology by vivifying the processes of social movement mobilisation and participation within the context of labour and environmental movement in the Eloor-Edayar region.

The claim made here is less about the generalisability of the social movement mobilisation experience in Kerala to the rest of India – something that would be erroneous considering Kerala's unique position when compared to the rest of the Indian state. However, the intention here is to expand the theories by bringing movements, movement actors and experiences outside the west or the Global North, and so to problematise dominant assumptions and theorisations based solely on Western movements and social settings. As a result, the hybrid approach adopted here should possibly be called postcolonial ethnography (Pal et al. 2024): a strategy that strikes a balance in exploring social structure, individual agency and their intersection.

An important aspect of this study is the parallel or synchronous focus on structural and individual aspects of social movement mobilisation. The findings featured in preceding chapters establish the myriad ways in which the structure affects the processes of social movement mobilisation at multiple levels. The data and arguments presented in these chapters reaffirm how the ideology of capitalism and capitalist institutions influence the mobilisation processes of individual movements. Aside from showcasing the influence of the political economy on the meso level, the chapters also exemplify how the ideology of development and the logic of capitalism combine to influence the micro-mobilisation processes of such movements. In particular, the findings that embellish the influence

of ideologies on framing and frame-disputes seek to contribute to the long-standing discussions and debates surrounding framing and ideology (Oliver and Johnston 2000; Snow and Benford 2005).

Limitations

One of the significant limitations of this study is that it focuses only on labour-environmental conflicts, completely omitting coalitions. The lack of focus on coalitions prevents this inquiry from making a comprehensive analysis of labour-environmental relations in the Global South. The case presented here should not therefore be considered as a typification of labour-environmental relations in the Global South, or even in Kerala itself. The focus on a single case study also limits the capacity for generalisation of the findings presented above. The attempt here has rather been largely to problematise and update existing research by focusing on a case located in the Global South that features labour and green movements with working-class participants. This does not preclude the possibility of inter-class conflicts between labour and the green movements.

In other words, the choice of the movements presented here does not imply that all labour and environmental movements in India fit these class characteristics or ideological orientations. Having said that, the study delves into a sort of hegemonic coalition between the institutionalised trade unions, industries and the state. This points towards the need to understand coalition better – not only in terms of labour-environmental coalitions, but also regarding those between other actors that form part of the equation. More research needs to be done to explore the unpacking of such coalitions further, as well as on their implications for movement mobilisation.

The grassroots environmental movement considered in this study, PMVS, signifies how the majority of grassroots environmental movements in countries such as India bear a close resemblance to the environmental justice movement in the United States. Even though the study emphasises the differences between Global North and Global South, the similarities between them in terms of the environmental justice movements have not been adequately pursued or analysed here. This study thus proposes such a topic as a potential future direction for research, in which the similarities between working-class environmental movements in the Global South are examined alongside environmental justice movements in the North.

Such an inquiry will help us to understand the similarities in movements across the two settings by breaking away from the North-South binary. It might in fact uncover the operation of a South within the North, in terms of the structural and institutional inequality in the distribution of power, resources and wealth. The inquiry will also enable a comprehensive understanding of resistance to the capitalist system of production and exploitation that occurs across the globe, while also being mindful of the differences. Having said that, the use of the Global South in this setting has its limitations, as it confines all movement experiences within the binary of North and South. In addition, it oversimplifies the social, political and economic contexts and realities of the numerous countries brought together under the umbrella category of 'Global South'. However, this study still retains the term in an attempt to engage with the larger research and dialogue that surrounds the North-South distinction operative or prevails in academia.

The examination of class in the project could also be critiqued for not following the rubrics laid out in a standard Marxian class analysis. Here the heightened focus on interpretations and the meanings attributed by participants, who are movement actors, have precluded discussions into the operation of these terms within traditional Marxist theory and literature. Moreover, the use of class as a binary concept while discussing the shift in class politics that has taken place within the labour movement is also problematic, not least when distinguishing trade union leaders from ordinary members. The interviews conducted in this project primarily feature union leaders; a similar inquiry among factory workers might produce a different outcome. However, the observations surrounding the sectoral origins of economic interests among workers would still hold.

Another important limitation of this study pertains to the complete omission of other social axes, for instance caste and gender. The excessive focus on class pre-empts this study from making meaningful inquiries into other social aspects and identities regarding the movement actors. The movement field I studied is dominated by men, a situation that applies both to trade unions and to the local environmental movement. When compared to the unions, the local environmental movement did have a few women members. However, it should be noted that all the key positions were held by men.

In this study I did not pursue or problematise the missing women from Kerala's movement field. The absence of women from the movement field[2] is significant, considering the history of the state and the advances in gender empowerment often attributed to the 'Kerala

model'. However, it also confirms the critical feminist critiques on Kerala's development model (Devika and Thampi 2007) that often dubs 'empowerment' within the contours of the traditional family, and thus maintain the systems of patriarchy. This lack of focus on 'liberation' is apparent in the present study, and this again is a topic for further inquiry.

My positionality and standpoint could also be a point of critique for this study. My own commitment to social and environmental justice has played an instrumental role in the shaping of this project. The design and execution of the present study has been influenced by my previous research with environmental movements in Kerala and other environmental organisations in India. In other words, *Labour, Nature and Capitalism* has been influenced by my critical standpoint and prior research experiences. A combination of ethnography and document analysis is adopted to offer validity to its findings and to enable triangulation. Nevertheless, the observations and discussions presented here are subjective as much as objective, in terms of my presence and role as both researcher and participant. In that respect, this study should be regarded as a journey through the narratives and interpretations of the members of two movement groups.

More often than not, I felt that my task here is to retell the stories my participants told me. In doing so, I realised that the text presented here is co-produced. This does not discount my position of power and privilege in terms of demanding which stories or excerpts made it into the book. However, the systematic process of coding ensured the emergence of dominant themes from the different forms of data, transformed into text, collected throughout this inquiry. In addition, the increased reception and ease of entry to the movement settings of the environmental movement enabled in-depth inquiries into the mobilisation processes and rationale of the movement when compared to the trade unions. Having said that, my positionality and biography are also strengths, contributing to my local insights into the ecology of the region, the importance of the River Periyar and the lived experiences of the people.

Incomplete inquiries and future research

A few important aspects that emerged during the ethnographic research and analysis for this book had to be reluctantly shelved through lack of time. These are briefly introduced here to establish the agenda for future inquiries.

The intersection of class, caste and environmental inequalities in movement mobilisation and grievance interpretation should be examined to understand how they impact upon labour-environmental relations. More importantly, the class disparity between union leaders and rank-and-file members should be subjected to a detailed inquiry. While understanding the shifting class politics that has occurred within the labour movement, an extensive inquiry is required to understand how workers, as opposed to trade union leaders, interpret these shifts. These questions are not adequately explored in this study, but they are extremely important and should be pursued in future research. Similarly, the role of working-class movements in climate justice activism is only touched upon here. There should be more in-depth analysis into the ways in which working-class environmental movements interpret the threat from climate disruptions in the Global South, as well as their role in organising climate action.

A careful analysis of the media and news reports indicate that Kerala's movement field is replete with environmental struggles resisting the destruction of nature in the name of development. The proliferation[3] of such movements in the last few years raises pertinent questions about the relationship between left-wing political parties and the environment, especially as the state is currently governed by a coalition led by the Left Democratic Front (LDF), led in turn by the Communist Party of India, Marxist (CPIM). More detailed inquiries are required to understand the commonalities of these movements.

Furthermore, in-depth studies are required to understand how the shift in class politics in the state manifests in the relationship between labour and other progressive social movements in Kerala (relating for instance to caste, environment or gender). Such inquiries will raise questions about the 'Kerala Model' of development from the standpoints of social and environmental justice and sustainability. Moreover, an extension of this study to include more cases will help us to understand more clearly the relationship between labour, nature and capital in Kerala.

Amartya Sen's (2003) seminal article on 'missing women', discussed the issue of 'sex-selective abortions' in Asia and Africa. Borrowing the title from Sen, future research should focus on the issue of 'missing women' from Kerala's social movement landscape. This is not to overlook the history of feminist struggles in the state, the instrumental role played by women and gender queer activists or the germinal works that have come out on women's political participation. Rather the call is to expand inquiries in order to integrate and document women's collective

mobilising experiences into the field of movement studies. This should in turn be subjected to an in-depth inquiry considering the strides made by Kerala in achieving gender equality and implementing programmes for female empowerment. Such an investigation will uncover how the 'Kerala model' performs in terms of women's non-institutional – or extra-institutional – political action, studied through their participation in social movements or in contentious politics more broadly.

One of the important aspects that surfaced during research and analysis was the central role played by the River Periyar. This river is present in almost all narratives included in the chapters in myriad ways, assuming different meanings as an object and as an actor. Throughout the narratives the river is interpreted differently; it may appear as 1) a raw material or an input of production, 2) a place of reminiscence, holding valuable memories and emotions and 3) a field of protest. The emergence of River Periyar as an actor is an important development and should be further explored – particularly considering how the river tells its own story, the issue of pollution highlighted in its many colours. 'A river that flows in many colours' is a phrase often used to represent symbolically the trials and tribulations of people and region alike as they confront the effects of industrial pollution.

The River Periyar, in its many shades, offers an excellent empirical example around which to situate the debate between realist and constructionist approaches to understanding environmental issues. In light of the ongoing debates between Andreas Malm (2018) and Bruno Latour (2018) surrounding the realist and constructionist philosophical approaches to understanding the reality of climate change, this exemplar serves to establish the need to strike a balance between critical realist and constructionist approaches while undertaking socio-environmental inquiries.

Notes

1 The relevance of strain or breakdown here is largely in terms of how grievances create the conditions necessary to form collective action without discounting the importance of rational action that rests on collective identity formation, consciousness building and strategic planning. That is, a framework that points to the role of grievances in disrupting everyday life but without the limiting assumptions that prevailed in the classical strain and breakdown perspectives that termed collective action 'spontaneous' and actors as 'irrational'.

2 This is not to overlook the long history of feminist struggles, nor that of the strong interventions of women and queer activists and scholars in Kerala's movement landscape. Instead, the reference to 'missing women' is specifically in the context of the near total absence of women in the case of PMVS and SCTU, both of which are explored in this book. Having said that, I think it is important to conduct more research on how gender mediates social action and mobilising experiences (including both progressive and regressive) in the context of Kerala.

3 The protests in Puthuvype against the proposed LPG terminal (PTI 2017; *The Hindu* 2017), the *Vayalkili* (Farm Birds) movement in Keezhattoor fighting against the filling up of wet and paddy fields (Ameerudheen 2018) and the movement to save Santhivanam from the proposed 110 KV electricity supply line (Balan 2019) are just a few among the many dissenting collectives fighting against the adverse environmental impacts of state-led development projects.

Epilogue

In this Epilogue I explore why the tale of industrial pollution in Eloor is not only an account of predatory capitalism, but also the story of a river. The River Periyar now carries the toxic remnants of development, yet it also embodies people's emotional and material connections to nature. Previous chapters have explained the ways in which this river holds a central position in the narratives constructed around pollution. It enters movement frames and participants' narrations as a site of conflict, a field of protest, an element of nature with which people share strong emotional bonds and a once-pristine aspect of mother nature; the list continues. The sad plight of the river today is clearly as a strong motive for people choosing to fight against pollution. Although never a key focus in the proposed project when it started, almost all the data is perfectly concentrated around it.

The following section is an open dialogue about how nature emerged as a crucial actor in this project and what that means to analysing qualitative data using constructionist grounded theory approach. Given the ongoing contestations between realist and constructionist approaches to socio-environmental research, this chapter identifies the limitations of adopting a strict constructionist lens, drawing upon the case of the river and the story it conveys through its many shades.

River Periyar was not the central focus of the proposed study. However, it played a crucial part in the stories of people I interviewed and has remained a central aspect of campaign materials, movement demands, protest repertoires, state documents and interventions. In this Epilogue I tease out the emergent ideas associated with nature in the context of this study and reveal how these manifest in the contested process of reality construction that surrounds industrial pollution.

Furthermore, this discussion assumes greater relevance in the backdrop of ongoing debates between the realist and constructionist approaches that conduct research into environmental issues. In particular I consider the critique posed by Andreas Malm (2017) in *The Progress of this Storm*, which highlights the pitfalls of pursuing research on environmental issues using purist versions of social constructionism, and the publication of Bruno Latour's *Down to Earth: The politics of new climate regime* (2018).

Both works warn us against the tendency to interpret scientific facts using the lexicons of politics. However, it is quite a coincidence that much of Malm's book seeks to expose the problematics associated with Latour's work that calls the objective foundations of scientific research into question – an area that has blossomed into Science Technology Studies (STS). Malm explains how Latour's arguments were actively adopted by climate denialists to delegitimise the scientific research on climate change. Latour may have realised the issues with his own research, writing this new book as an attempt to put the worms back into the can he helped to open. Certainly Latour seems to have recognised some of the points identified by Malm, including how he holds his, Latour's, own work partially responsible for handing over a means to kill climate science by attacking its objective epistemological and ontological foundations. However, such recourse does not help to contain the anti-science movement that he involuntary enabled to gain traction among people.

In a world where repeated lies often masquerade as truths, it is important to reconsider the use of social constructionist approaches to understand environmental issues. This is particularly the case when the logic underlying the paradigm serves to render all competing claims equally valid, without caring to check the claims' validity or the credibility of scientific facts supporting them. This is not to say that the positivistic methods of scientific research are beyond critique. There are, of course, clear divides between the positivist and post-positivist approaches to the production of knowledge. However, it enables light to be shed at a point when postmodern, post-structural and postcolonial terms appear in the claims made by right-wing countermovements seeking theories to back their rhetoric against the reality of climate change. However, it would be a mistake to blame these theoretical traditions and to hold their authors accountable for the ways in which theories are used in contemporary society.

Researching environmental issues in the post-truth era

A river that flows in many shades occupies a central role in the framings and imageries surrounding labour-environmental conflicts, as discussed in previous chapters of this work. The river is embedded into their narrative, as they explore topics ranging from the onset of local industrialisation to the ongoing issue of industrial pollution. One could almost argue that in this book the river becomes an actor with rights (Willems et al. 2021 discuss the legal practice of granting personhood to rivers) who reflects and responds to changes in the local ecology. Such centrality is multidimensional too, at once both geographical and discursive. The River Periyar encircles the industrial hub – a situation created by design, as the planners were keen on exploiting its waters as both a 'source' and a 'sink' for industries. The river is permeable and discursive, seeping into the stories and narratives shared by those who talked about their everyday lives, industrial pollution and labour-environmental conflicts. Although this was not intended, River Periyar has ended up occupying a prominent place in this study. This was inductive too; the river emerged as a stakeholder of sorts that I had missed when planning the design and identifying participants for this research. Such realisation was a moment of reflection for me, with the field and people foregrounding their narratives and enhancing my initial conception, in which the river flowed only in the background.

Does this realisation then imply that the river is emerging as an actor and making itself pronounced through individual stories? In addition, since the narratives surrounding the River Periyar feature in varying and often opposing forms, may we conclude that it is both culturally and socially constructed? The remainder of this Epilogue seeks to show how the river at once becomes a material as well as a discursive reality, depending on the epistemological and ontological standpoints that lie beneath the modes of inquiry. In attempting this, I also try to delineate the epistemological and ontological contours that have guided my inquiry. I believe such delineation is important in research on socio-ecological issues, especially given the mounting global threat from climate crises.

'A river that flows in many colours'

The river is ever present in all the narratives and passages concerned with the past and present of industrialisation in Eloor-Edayar region. A river

flowing in many colours epitomises the unique position it occupies in reflections upon the region and its people. This often leads to questions regarding the role, and perhaps the agency, of nature as an actor in social ecological issues, leading us in turn to the ongoing debates on constructionism versus realism[1] that occur within environmental sociology and social science more broadly. More than a theoretical debate, most of these exchanges deal with epistemological questions which also hinge heavily on the ontology of nature.

There is a clear polarisation between a constructionist and a realist take on nature, as well as the way in which it is conceptualised. For the constructionist, nature is culturally determined; it is 'a social construction' that is impingent upon cultural understandings, making it rather similar to a 'contextualised idea'. Building on a postmodern approach, many of these studies[2] understand nature as a reality that is open to interpretations, in effect an 'extra discursive reality' (See Malm 2018; Castree 2013; and Wapner 2010). In contrast, scholars such as Andreas Malm (2018) propose 'epistemological climate realism' as an approach to help us develop a theoretical position able to support social action and intervention. This approach, monikered as 'socialist climate realism' (built on historical materialism) serves as a contribution to ecological Marxism (Angus 2016), in which the material reality of nature assumes importance. Malm (2018, 26) elaborates on his issues with constructionist approaches using the following example:

> Ten herders can draw very different portraits of the same goat, but that does not mean that the goat is a painting. If three hikers come down from a mountain with differing impressions – the first found it an easy trip; the second is heavily pregnant and could barely make it; the third is mostly struck by the novelty of snow – we do not thereby infer that they must have climbed three different mountains. We believe that the mountain is one, and that it has certain features, such as height, gradient and extent of the snowpack, that exist in themselves regardless of how the hikers have perceived them. As humans, we cannot say what a storm is like without deploying language, but that does not mean that the storm is a linguistic entity or consists of speech acts.

As the passage quoted above shows, Malm exposes the problematics of perceiving nature as an idea that is socially and culturally constructed. Drawing on the global climate crises, he explains how acknowledging the existence of climate disruptions is a necessary step in devising

strategies to tackle them effectively. By bracketing nature as a discursive entity – that is, one outside the realm of identifying certain independent features that exist irrespective of varying perceptions – we are embarking on a dangerous terrain: the sand shifts beneath underneath our feet as we confront climate change. In other words, there often seems to be a trade-off between nature as a real entity versus nature as something socially constructed.

The question then arises of whether nature can exist independently of people (as far as it can do so), while people construct stories about it. If not, how do we study it? Possibly by a mix of realism and constructionism, by accepting the material reality of nature while also recognising the myriad ways in which people make sense of it. Like the mountain Malm refers to, it is certainly important to accept that it exists regardless of how we perceive it, even as we also study the various perceptions constructed by the hikers. In order to understand labour-environmental conflicts through the competing frames produced by the two social movements, I have resorted to a similar approach. By mixing domain assumptions, I bring the material reality of the river and its existence to the centre, while also exploring the various frames and narratives that are constructed regarding its direction flow, existence of pollutants and the causes of river discoloration.

Taking a Latourian route (the younger Latour), one can use the campaign materials of environmental groups to attribute agency to the river. This is illustrated by a pamphlet circulated by PMVS, which features a letter from the river calling on people to fight against pollution. The frames here treat the River Periyar as a person with rights, duties and agency (Latour 2005). In this 'letter written by a dying river',[3] green activists creatively and imaginatively used the voice of the river to gain participation and support from the audience. The letter calls people to action by portraying this as a fight to save life. The river speaks as follows:

> Dear Friend,
> I hope you have not forgotten me. I travel 244 kilometres before reaching the Arabian Sea. Too many dams have chained my limbs that it so hard for me to move and I have transformed into a lagoon now. You might still remember the old stories about my medicinal properties. The many varieties of fish that played in my lap used to be your main source of food and livelihood. Many crops flourished on my banks including the unique *Pokkali* cultivation. I provide drinking water to more than 33 lakhs of people. All these will soon form part of history as I am too tired. This rabid development has

> changed me into a demon carrying poison in my breasts. I have lost my medicinal values, fish are dying fast, crops are failing. People are becoming slaves to chronic illnesses. Are you staying silent after knowing all this? If so, your life is in danger. If not to save me, can't you at least be a part of the activities organised by Periyar Malineekaran Virudha Samithi to save your life? … hoping that you will join the bus carrying our protest warriors.

Frames constructed by the green movements are replete with instances in which the river is treated as a person. Using a mythological reference to Bhoothana, a demoness who carried poison in her breast to kill Krishna, the frame attempts to establish a connection to the people through an appeal by the dying river, a 'being' of whom people cherish fond memories. By portraying the river as a 'mother' who feeds and nurtures all living beings, the frames attempt to invoke profound personal and emotional connections in addition to mythological references.

On the other hand, from a real standpoint, a river that carries toxic chemicals and flows in different colours as a result, provides powerful testimony to the environmental externalities of industrial production. In other words, the river confirms claims and arguments made by the local environmental movement. The discoloured river and the dead fish it carries clearly show that something is seriously wrong with the local environment. It could be argued that the river aligns with the local greens by flowing in many shades – a situation that underlies the importance of accepting nature as a material reality which embodies the effects of human actions.

So we see that the approach adopted here is cemented on an epistemological position: one accepts environmental pollution as a reality substantiated by scientific studies. Here the river is real and beyond dispute; there is only one River Periyar and it is not a construction or a hybrid. However, this is done without erasing the possibility of there being varying interpretations of this nature by people themselves. Such a possibility is elaborated in previous chapters through the claims of individuals regarding the existence and causes of pollution, or the opposing frames. A pamphlet published by PMVS on 28 March 2010 and announcing a policy discussion on environmental issues states:

> In January 2010 the Ministry of Environment and Forest [MoEF] at the Centre issued a statement detailing the findings of the study conducted in 43 industrial cities. The statement lists the Greater Cochin area as one among the heavily polluted regions …

> On 15 March 2010, the Ministry declared that the Eloor-Edayar industrial area and Ambalamukal are the most polluted sites in Kochi … The region, including Eloor and Edayar, is ranked 24th among other critically polluted areas in India.

Scientific information that measures and quantifies the extent of pollution, nature and toxicity of pollutants, as well as the ranking of the region among other polluted areas, are used extensively to gain legitimacy and attract the attention of local audiences and media. Here the River Periyar is perceived as a measurable entity, that has an existence independent of all other stakeholders. The way in which we see and perceive nature clearly matters in terms of solving environmental issues. For example, if we take the pure constructionist route and assume that nature is socially constructed, or that there is nothing called nature apart from its existence as an idea or in human imagination, then it becomes difficult to conceive of solutions for ecological issues. This is all the more problematic when, as a society, we are grappling with the real and potential consequences of climate crisis.

In order to intervene, therefore, we need to identify the problem clearly. To do so, it is important that we acknowledge and agree upon the material existence of nature. This 'nature', of course, exists independent of human beings at the same time as it is impacted upon by human actions. Having said that, this does not indicate how movements and actors make sense of everyday reality. A closer observation of the politics of denial that surround issues of pollution in the industrial belt may serve to confirm what Latour has observed in the context of global climate denial – a scenario in which denial is often an attempt to preserve the status quo. Similarly, the simultaneous presence and absence of pollution in the Eloor-Edayar region indicates not only the epistemic positions of the actors, but also the structural situatedness and socially organised mode of interpreting reality.

Notes

1 Agnosticism versus pragmatism (Dunlap 2010).
2 Malm (2018) categorises them into constructionism and hybridism; he deals with them separately in his book.
3 This letter was recovered while collecting and archiving the campaign material of PMVS. Written by Yohannan Varappuzha, a leading member of the PMVS, it was dated 19 June 2000. This letter was widely circulated in the form of a pamphlet by the campaign.

Appendix: Abbreviations

AITUC:	All India Trade Union Congress
BJP:	Bharatiya Janata Party
BMS:	Bharatiya Mazdoor Sangh
CITU:	Centre of Indian Trade Unions
CPI(M):	Communist Party of India (Marxist)
CPI:	Communist Party of India
ENGO:	Environmental Non-Governmental Organisation
FACT:	The Fertilizers and Chemicals Travancore Ltd
ILO:	International Labour Organization
IRE:	Indian Rare Earths
INTUC:	Indian National Trade Union Congress
KPCB:	Kerala State Pollution Control Board
LAEC:	Local Area Environment Committee
LDF:	Left Democratic Front
NIIST:	National Institute of Interdisciplinary Science and Technology
OECD:	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
PMVS:	*Periyar Malineekarana Virudha Samithi* (Periyar Anti-Pollution Committee)
PML:	Paradise Minerals Limited
PTI:	Press Trust of India
SCMC:	Supreme Court Monitoring Committee
SCTU:	Standing Council for Trade Unions
TCC:	The Travancore Cochin Chemicals Ltd
UDF:	United Democratic Front
UNDP:	United Nations Development Programme
WEF:	World Economic Forum

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Index

'*Labour, Nature and Capitalism* is a carefully researched as well as theoretically astute book on a subject of vital importance to India and the world. Based on fieldwork in Kerala, Dr Silpa Satheesh studies the tensions between grassroots environmental groups and trade unions, analysing how factory labour finds itself in opposition to other, even more vulnerable sections, of the working-class... Through her work, Dr Satheesh convincingly demonstrates that the conventional polarity of "environment versus development" is false and even pernicious.'

Ramachandra Guha, author of Speaking with Nature: The Origins of Indian Environmentalism

Labour, Nature and Capitalism traces how the alliance between labour and capital manifests in the form of conflicts between organised trade unions and a local environmental movement in the context of the much-acclaimed Kerala model of development. It explores the history of the area's local industrialisation, the presence of varied economic interests and exposes the barriers to forming solidarity networks among the working-classes.

Situated in the backdrop of the Eloor-Edayar industrial belt, this book delves deeper into the ways in which capitalism infiltrates and manipulates the social movement landscape in Kerala. It shows how the hegemonic coalition between the state, industries and institutionalised trade unions enable capitalist rationality to mediate and control social movements in postcolonial settings.

Using an ethnographic approach, the book seeks to embark on a journey to understand the tensions between two progressive social movements – a trade union collective and a local environmental movement – foregrounding the experiences of members of the respective groups. The analysis presented here shows how the contestations/conflicts between the movements stem from interpretive as well as ideological differences surrounding economic development and environmental justice.

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