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The Sociology of Insurgency in Indigenous Communities:  
Moral Economy, Class Analysis, Geopolitical and Political Economy  
Explanations of “Naxalism” in Chhattisgarh, India

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**The Sociology of Insurgency in Indigenous Communities: Moral Economy, Class Analysis, Geopolitical, and Political Economy Explanations of “Naxalism” in Chhattisgarh, India<sup>1</sup>**

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Indigenous peoples have played a central role in many recent rural insurgencies. This article combines fuzzy sets with ethnographic data to analyze this phenomenon in a crucial case through the framework of theories developed to explain rural revolutionary activity in the 1970s. It advances a syncretic approach, which utilizes aspects of moral economy, class conflict and geopolitical theories. It is found that rural insurgency in Chhattisgarh, India occurs where people are embedded in a socioeconomic structure that affords high levels of communal solidarity and organizational autonomy due to the lack of a distinct landowning class, but in which they are also class conscious as a result of being partially integrated into the dominant capitalist system. The insurgent organization plays an important role transforming latent socioeconomic antagonism into a sustained movement. Its popular support is due to its defense of the majority of indigenous people's interests against those of the dominant society and collaborating indigenous people.

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Throughout the world indigenous peoples are engaged in hundreds of struggles with the dominant states in which they live. It has been argued that the number of such conflicts has surged recently as a consequence of “globalization”. Mander (2006:3) contends that “no communities or peoples on this earth have been more negatively impacted by the current global economic system than the world’s remaining 350 million indigenous peoples. And no people are so strenuously and, lately, successfully resisting these invasions and inroads”. Indigenous resistance manifests itself in both violent and non-violent activity, but – as a result of the marginal geographical, political and technological position of indigenous peoples – where resistance is violent it tends to take on the form of rural insurgency.<sup>2</sup> *Thus, this new wave of rural insurgency is part of a broader pattern of increasing social movements involving indigenous peoples that are widely understood as a resistance to the forces of globalization.*

In the early 1960s Franz Fanon referred to “the peasantry” as the “revolutionary proletariat of our times”, but this maxim is perhaps now more suited to indigenous peoples. The Shining Path in Peru and Zapatistas in Chiapas are salient examples of rural insurgency among indigenous people in Latin America. The violent resistance of indigenous communities to commercial oil refineries and pipelines in the Niger Delta also illustrates this phenomenon. Its potency has been most lucidly demonstrated in Nepal where, between 1996 and 2006, a Maoist guerilla force expanded from an insignificant rural base to a become a dominant force in national politics.

Attention on neighboring India tends to focus on its near double-digit economic growth and impending world power status (Government of India 2008a; Wilson and Purushothaman 2003). But since the mid-1940s when the Communist Party of India (CPI) began a Maoist insurgency against exploitative landlords in Telangana, central India, the country has encountered rural insurgency in ebbs and flows. In the past few years it has experienced a resurgence in

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<sup>2</sup> Rural insurgency is a syncretic phenomenon combining three elements: the spirit of traditional peasant rebellion; the ideology and organization of modern revolution; and the operational doctrines of guerrilla warfare (Desai and Eckstein 1990:442).

central and eastern areas that are inhabited by *adivasis* – a term that means “original inhabitants” in Hindi.<sup>3</sup> It is said that the insurgents have established a “red corridor” running from the Nepalese border to north of Hyderabad, and the Government of India estimates that the insurgency now affects 192 out of 612 districts in India (Mehra 2008, 14). While these areas are a long way from India’s political and economic centers, Prime Minister Manmohan Singh’s (2006) declared that the insurgency posed “the single biggest internal-security challenge ever faced by our country”.

Despite its continued and changing importance throughout the developing world, social science has largely ignored rural insurgency in recent times. The last sustained attempt among western social scientists to understand rural insurgency was in the 1970s and was provoked in part by American intervention in Vietnam (Skocpol 1982:352). This “boomlet” (Scott 1977b:231) in the study of rural insurgency produced three sets of theories, which neatly reflect three general traditions in the study of social movements. The moral economy theory of Wolf (1969) and Scott (1976) shares with Durkheim a concern for the anomie wrought by industrialization and capitalism. The class conflict approach of Paige (1975) applies Marxist analysis to the rural context. Popkin’s (1979) political economy model rejects these structural explanations. Instead, it stresses the choices made by individual utility-maximizers in a manner that is heavily influenced by rational actor theory and can be traced to John Stuart Mill. In addition, we consider Kalyvas’ (2006) contention that an area’s geopolitical suitability to guerrilla warfare has a critical influence on an individual’s decision whether or not to support an insurgency. Empirical support and exemplary studies exist for each of these theories, which are, to some extent, mutually exclusive (Paige 1983:699). Thus, there remains a great deal of dissensus regarding the conditions that generate rural unrest and insurgent movements.

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<sup>3</sup> *Adivasis* are a heterogeneous group of communities believed to be India’s original inhabitants. Scheduled Tribes are “backward” or “depressed” communities recognized in the fifth schedule of the Indian Constitution. 85 million people are officially classified as scheduled tribes (Census of India 2001). Of these, about 16 million live in the states of north eastern India and are not considered to be *adivasis*. The remaining 70 million Scheduled Tribes that live in a more or less contiguous hill and forest belt are considered to be *adivasis* (Guha 2007:3305).

This article analyzes the rural insurgency in Chhattisgarh – a state that is often described as its epicenter – through the framework of these theories. Our objectives are twofold: we aim to first further our understanding of an empirical case that has hitherto received inadequate scholarly attention, and second to examine whether the theories of rural insurgency developed in the 1970s can be generalized to the contemporary insurgency among indigenous people in India. To this end there are seven sections. The first traces the historical trajectory of rural insurgency in India and outlines the deficiencies in current explanations of this phenomenon. The second reviews competing theories of rural insurgency, removes them from their specific context in order to make them commensurate with one other, and generates testable hypotheses. The third discusses methodology, arguing from a neo-Lakatosian perspective for an analysis of crucial cases using both quantitative and qualitative data. The fourth uses fuzzy sets to test the hypotheses, and the fifth, sixth and seventh combine this analysis with ethnographic data to answer the following questions: Which rural inhabitants are most prone to insurgency, and why? What roles do political and military organizations play in rural insurgency? And, does imperialism cause rural insurgency – and, if so, how? The conclusion summarizes our substantive findings and considers the theoretical implications of this analysis for the study of rural insurgency among indigenous peoples.

## RURAL INSURGENCY IN INDIA

“Naxalite” has become an umbrella term in India for various Maoist groups that aim to capture state power through protracted “People’s War”. It is derived from the Naxalbari region of West Bengal, where in 1967 elements of the CPI, in alliance with *adivasi* sharecroppers and landless laborers, began a violent uprising against exploitative landlords. The term is misleading, as Naxalbari was not the first Maoist insurgency affecting India, nor the only one in the late 1960s and early 1970s. The CPI’s flirtation with rural insurgency goes back to the Telangana movement

that began in 1946. The uprising was based upon sharecroppers' and landless laborers' resentment towards the power of former *deshmukhs* (revenue collectors with magisterial powers), who acted as landlords, merchants and usurers (Thirumali 1992:477-81). The second wave of CPI-led rural insurgency that began in the late 1960s did not exclusively occur in Naxalbari or West Bengal. In Srikakulam, Andhra Pradesh, unrest flared among the *adivasi* population; they took up arms against non-*adivasi* moneylenders who had forced them into indebtedness and reduced them to laborers on their own land (Mohanty 1977:53).

The social bases of the first two waves of Maoist insurgency were similar. Unrest in Telangana, Naxalbari and Srikakulam was a consequence of the "combination of very heavy pressure on the land, an unusually heavy concentration of landless and land poor, an increasing trend towards pauperization of the peasantry, and a high degree of parasitic landlordism" (Zagoria 1974:40). Support for the insurgencies was highest among sharecroppers and landless laborers, the very groups that Paige (1975) and Stinchcome (1961) point out are most likely to become revolutionary. Where these insurgencies involved *adivasis*, it was those communities that had already been horizontally integrated into the lowest orders of the socioeconomic structure. Thus the first two waves of Maoist insurgency can be understood as class conflict between exploited labor and the owners of the means of production *within the same socioeconomic and geographical area*. Ostensibly the Telangana movement was withdrawn in 1951 on the advice of Stalin (Banarjee 1984:66-7), but it had already been weakened by a combination of military activity and land reforms, which although imperfect had undermined the solidarity of the rural lower classes. The Naxalbari and Srikakulam movements were defeated by the same combination of ruthless repression and "selective ameliorative" land reforms (Banarjee 2006:3161).

After the collapse of these movements there was a conscious move by insurgent organizations to build their new bases in hilly, heavily forested areas that were defensible against government forces. Beginning in the 1980s, the insurgents gradually expanded their influence

from these secure bases into swathes of central and eastern India. The media now talk of a “red corridor” but in reality “there are many gaps and variations in the degree of influence” (Mohanty 2006:3167). This raises the question: why the insurgency is strong in some places and not in others? Up to now this issue has received limited scholarly attention (Sundar 2007:271), but there are two recurring observations in those accounts that do exist. One is that “Naxalite areas are among the poorest in the country” (Bhatia 2006:3181). Mehra (2008:2) refers to “islands of deprivation, which have over the years emerged as pockets of support for the Maoist movement”. It is true that insurgency occurs in areas where the vast majority of the population is poor, but nevertheless this argument is fundamentally flawed. A significant proportion of rural Indians live in abject poverty,<sup>4</sup> but only a small minority expresses their displeasure by supporting the insurgency. Thus, we must ask why the rural poor in some rural areas kill themselves, migrate to cities or do nothing, while those in other areas support insurgent organizations?

The second observation is that, while the insurgency has plateaued or regressed in its traditional strongholds of Andhra Pradesh and Bihar over the past ten to fifteen years, it has made major gains in the hilly, forested areas of central India that are predominately populated by *adivasis* – and particularly in Chhattisgarh (Banarjee 2006:3159; Guha 2007:3308; Gupta 2006:3174; Sagar 2006:3176). While this appears to be true, it does little to further our understanding of the insurgency because it does not specify whether the correlation is the result of the social structure of *adivasi* communities, the fact that they tend to live in geographically marginal areas that are suitable to rural insurgency, or that the land they inhabit contains large amounts of natural resources coveted by the dominant state and capitalists. Notwithstanding its imprecision, this observation points to an interesting empirical phenomenon: the current wave of rural insurgency appears to be strongest in the most geographically marginal areas of central India that are predominately inhabited by *adivasis who exist outside the control of landlords*. If

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<sup>4</sup> According to the World Bank (Chen and Ravallion 2008:32) 42% of Indians lived on less than \$1.25 a day, and 86% on less than \$2.50 a day in 2005. This suggests that it would be better to conceptualize India as a sea of deprivation with a few isolated islands of prosperity.

this is true its social base is different to Telangana, Naxalbari and Srikakulam and cannot be understood in terms of rural class conflict – at least in the narrow sense of access (or not) to land or other assets as defined by Stinchcombe, Paige or Zagoria. Thus it is high time for a theoretically informed, empirically grounded study of contemporary rural insurgency in India.

## THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVES ON RURAL INSURGENCY

### Moral Economy

The moral economy approach of Scott and Wolf stresses the disruptions caused in the transition from the “traditional” to “modern” society. Their approach argues that demographic changes, increased production for the market, and the strengthening of the state destroy traditional agrarian structures. This threatens the rural inhabitants’ physical security, especially in the face of subsistence crises, because it brings about a decline in the willingness of powerful or wealthy members of society to live up to norms of reciprocity. The moral economists argue that individuals embedded in different social structures react differently to these processes, and they stress two factors that determine the insurrectionary capacities of a particular community.

The first, emphasized by Wolf, is lower classes’ “tactical leverage” (Wolf 1969) or “organizational autonomy” to resist “the impact of hegemony ruling elites normally exercise” (Scott 1977a:271). “Ultimately, the decisive factor in making a peasant rebellion possible lies in the relations of the peasantry to the field of power that surrounds it. A rebellion cannot start from a situation of complete impotence” (Wolf 1969:290). Thus, sharecroppers and landless laborers are unlikely initiators of rebellion because they are vulnerable to repression from a distinct landowning class, to whom they are dependent or closely tied. The insurrectionary capacity of “middle peasants” is due to the fact they own and cultivate their own land, directly control the immediate processes of economic production, and are free from tight control of landlords. This is accentuated when they are relatively free from state repression, either by virtue of their marginal

geopolitical location or as a result of the intervention of armed revolutionaries.

Scott emphasizes the second factor, communal solidarity. He argues that “the more communal the village structure, the easier it is for a village to collectively defend its interests” (Scott 1976:201-2). Rural inhabitants with strong communal traditions and few sharp internal class divisions are more likely to revolt than those that are structurally and hence socially divided. Communal solidarity tends to be higher among landowning middle peasants than in other agrarian structures because they are not mutually competitive and because of the absence from the immediate vicinity of markedly differentiated classes. For Scott, the crucial insurrectionary capacities possessed by rural inhabitants are “cultural”, while for Wolf they lay in the “material and organizational advantages that their situation offers for collective resistance against outside oppressors” (Skocpol 1982:354). Ultimately, however, both conclude that it is landowning middle peasants living in communal villages outside direct landlord control who are most prone to insurgency.

### Class Conflict

Paige’s analysis displays elements that are distinctive to Marxist thinking, most notably the notion that participants support an insurgency as the result of the rational calculation of class interests. In extending class analysis from the city to the countryside Paige follows Stinchcombe (1961:165) by arguing that the economic and administrative character of rural enterprises determines their class relations. Whereas in Wolf and Scott’s accounts the fundamental causal variable is village structure, for Paige (1975:9-10) it “is the relationship of both cultivators and non-cultivators to the factors of agricultural production as indicated by their principal source of income”. Paige outlines a typology of agrarian production systems, each with a typical pattern of class relations, by dichotomizing income sources into land or wages for cultivators, and land or capital for noncultivators.

Paige argues, in contrast to the moral economists, that landowning middle peasants are unlikely to become insurrectionary because they are mutually isolated, economically competitive, risk averse and strongly dependent on upper classes. For Paige (1983:706), “a combination of noncultivators dependent on income from land and cultivators dependent on income from wages leads to revolution”. This dyad results in a zero sum game: the lower the wages paid by noncultivators the higher their profits, which leads them “to close off all avenues of social action except violent resistance” (Paige 1975:58). Thus Paige concludes that the most proletarianized rural inhabitants – landless laborers or sharecroppers who earn income from wages not land – are not class conscious because of their common origins in a village or because of a set of village traditions as moral economists have argued. They are class conscious because they exist in a system of agrarian production that generates intense class conflict over land and the surplus produced on that land.

#### The Geopolitical Explanation

Almost every macro-sociological account of rural insurgency – including Scott, Wolf and Paige’s – points to the importance of preexisting popular allegiances emanating from social structural characteristics. Actions occurring during an insurgency are seen as a consequence of beliefs and grievances that existed before its outset. Insurgent activity is understood to be the result of a deep crisis of legitimacy in which substantial segments of the population are intensely opposed to the government and reallocate their support to the rebels. This implies that people consciously choose who to support based on a social profile or ideology – as if they were voting in an election.

Kalyvas criticizes these approaches and argues that pre-war preferences may be an inaccurate predictor of the distribution of attitudes and actions once the conflict has begun. This is particularly true in the kind of irregular warfare that characterizes rural insurgency. Kalyvas

(2006:78-85) suggests that control is generally a more accurate predictor of insurgent support than pre-war preferences; and control hinges largely on military effectiveness, which in turn is determined by geography (ibid:132). Thus the fundamental issue for Kalyvas is not what type of rural inhabitant is most likely to support an insurgency, but what areas are most suited to guerilla warfare. He points out that insurgents tend to be uniformly weak in towns, plains, key communication lines, and accessible terrain – even in cases where they were pre-war strongholds. Rural areas, on the other hand, especially mountainous and rugged terrain, a long way from administrative centers and close to administrative borders, tend to be guerilla strongholds – again often regardless of their pre-war political preferences (Kalyvas 2006:136-7; also see Fearon and Laitin 2003). Such areas provide physical advantages for guerillas and great obstacles for conventional military forces.

### Political Economy

The moral economy and class conflict approaches explain insurgencies in terms of the economic interests and social circumstances of rural inhabitants. Consequently they tend to diminish the causal importance of political and military organizations in rural insurgency (see Paige 1975:62; Scott 1977a:295-6). This goes against a vast body of research that suggests “peasants are only part of the story” (Skocpol 1982:373). Lenin (1929:96) emphasized the importance of a “vanguard party” composed of full-time professional revolutionaries without which “no class in modern society can wage a determined struggle”; Trotsky (1965:xix) wrote that without a revolutionary organization “the energy of the masses would dissipate like steam not enclosed in a piston box”, although he goes on to clarify, that “what moves things is not the piston or the box, but the steam”; and Tilly (1978) points out that discontent is unlikely to lead to revolution if the discontented remain unorganized and lack resources. It seems unlikely that discontent can, on its own, explain participation in an insurgency – especially when the likely costs are high and the

potential benefits are limited. Thus the theoretical approaches that we have hitherto considered might benefit from being supplemented with complementary analyses that take into account the role of outside political and military organizations in transforming unrest into insurgency.

These issues are addressed by Popkin: he argues that “peasants” are rational, self-interested, utility-maximizers, and conceptualizes rural communities in terms of modern economies in which individuals compete against one another for their survival. Consequently the individual rural inhabitant, or his family, is his unit of analysis, rather than Scott’s village or Paige’s class. Popkin argues that political, social and economic resources are distributed unevenly in rural communities, with the majority badly exploited by the minority. Thus, while Popkin understands villages as closed and unified – as moral economists do – he argues that this unity is enforced from the top by those who want to sustain their own privilege, rather than the whole community for altruistic reasons. Rebellion against this situation by the lower orders of rural society is normally not possible because they are dependent on wealthier neighbors for support. Collective efforts tend to fail because of the temptation on the part of poor inhabitants, often living on the level of subsistence, to act as freeriders.

Popkin’s analysis provides two salient insights. First, he emphasizes the role of outside actors in the growth of rural insurgencies. The self-interested “rational peasant” can only be united by political entrepreneurs offering localized and selective incentives that are contingent on their participation, as well as the expectation of powerful allies outside the village in the event of a conflict with the upper classes. “When a peasant makes his personal cost-benefit calculations about the expected returns on his own inputs, he is making subjective estimates of the credibility of the organizer, the ‘political entrepreneur’, to deliver... The importance of the leader as a collective entrepreneur – someone willing to invest his own time and resources to co-ordinate the inputs of others in order to produce collective action or collective goods – cannot be underestimated” (Popkin 1979:259).

Second, Popkin conceptualizes rural insurgencies as processes that provide a medium for a variety of grievances to be realized within the space of a greater conflict, rather than as binary conflicts fought over a single-issue. As Skocpol (1982:358) points out, “invariably, Communist parties *come to* agrarian lower classes in search of their support for national political objectives that go well beyond the immediate goals of the vast majority of the peasants, whether smallholders or sharecroppers” (original emphasis). An alliance is formed between supralocal and local actors; this entails a transaction in which the former supplies the latter with external muscle, allowing them to win decisive advantage over local rivals and, in exchange, the latter allow the former to tap into local networks and generate popular support. Consequently, conflicts “on the ground” are often more related to local issues than the “master cleavage” that drives the movement at the national level – even though “local cleavages are usually framed in the discursive terminology of the master cleavage” (Kalyvas 2006:364).

#### Capitalism, Imperialism and Theories of Rural Insurgency

Scott and Wolf stress the importance of capitalist penetration in promoting rural unrest. This is because they assume the key supra-family institutions governing behavior in precapitalist communities – the village and patron-client relations – lead to more moral outcomes with respect to welfare than the socioeconomic arrangements and institutions produced by modern capitalism. Their favorable portrayal of precapitalist agrarian society leads moral economists to view capitalism as a threat to poor rural inhabitants (Popkin 1979:63-4): “Capitalism turns labor, land and wealth into commodities” and this is “a short-hand formula for the liquidation of encumbering social and cultural institutions” (Wolf 1969:280). Migdal (1974:92) sees “imperialism” rather than capitalism as the threat, and emphasizes the importance of “more effective administrative techniques” and “more complex and coherent” bureaucracies in liquidating traditional institutions. He concludes that rural unrest is predominantly a consequence

of increasing state control over previously autonomous villages and more efficient methods of transferring wealth from the peripheries to societies' centers. Thus moral economists see rural unrest as “defensive reactions” against threats – from either capitalism or imperialism – to traditional institutions. As Wolf (1969:292) remarks, “it is the very attempt of the middle and free peasant to remain traditional which makes him revolutionary”.

Paige is not concerned with the impact of encroaching capitalism or imperialism upon traditional societies. Rather, he suggests that the decline in the strength of political controls that accompanied decolonization gave “the new forms of class cleavage and class conflict introduced by the agricultural export economy” the opportunity to develop into rural insurgencies (Paige 1975:3). Thus, Paige sees agrarian cultivators reacting from within the capitalist economy to overthrow landed upper classes previously dependent on the support of the colonial state for their survival. Popkin (1979:63) argues that moral economists take an overly benign view of precapitalist rural society and this leads to reevaluate the impact of capitalism on poor rural inhabitants: “Precisely because insurance, welfare, and subsistence guarantees within pre-capitalist villages are *limited*, a change in village structure – from closed to open villages – does not necessarily, as moral economists have asserted, result in the loss of these supports, although it may change their nature” (original emphasis). In fact, the expansion of the market and state can provide new opportunities for poorer rural inhabitants, while eroding the power of traditional elites.

### Hypotheses

Moral economists see landowning middle peasants as the main supporters of rural insurgency because of their communal solidarity and organizational autonomy. Class analysts argue that revolutionary movements arise where proletarianized rural inhabitants confront upper classes that have nothing but their claim on land itself as the basis of their domination. For Kalyvas, the

suitability of an area to guerilla warfare is far more important than its socioeconomic structure.

From these theories we generate three competing hypotheses:

HYPOTHESIS 1.– *Rural inhabitants are most likely to be involved in insurgent activity where communal solidarity and organizational autonomy is highest.*

HYPOTHESIS 2.– *Rural inhabitants are most likely to be involved in insurgent activity where cultivators are dependent on income from wages rather than land, and confront noncultivators who are dependent on income from land rather than capital.*

HYPOTHESIS 3.– *Rural inhabitants are most likely to be involved in insurgent activity in areas where the physical and political geography is suited to guerilla warfare.*

Popkin explains the development of stable and rewarding social exchanges between revolutionary organizations and rural populations by conceptualizing the overall likelihood of collective action as the sum of self-interested actions.

HYPOTHESIS 4.– *Rural inhabitants will actively choose to support an insurgent organization because they expect to gain personally from their involvement.*

Moral economists stress the expansion of the markets or state bureaucracy as the fundamental promoter of rural insurgency.

HYPOTHESIS 5.– *Insurgent activity is most likely to occur in areas where the markets and state are increasing their influence over previously autonomous villages.*

#### COMPARATIVE SOCIAL SCIENCE FROM A NEO-LAKATOSIAN PERSPECTIVE

Why study Chhattisgarh? Can analyzing this one case refute alternative theories of rural insurgency? Why is rural insurgency important to sociologists in general? In order to answer these questions we follow King and Sznajder (2006) by reconstructing Lakatos' theory of competing research traditions for comparative social analysis. This is influenced by Burawoy's (1989; 1990) suggestion that sociologists follow a Lakatosian understanding of progress in social

science. Lakatos (1970:155) argues that “the history of science has and should be the history of competing research programs”. Science progresses through the competition of groups of scholars in “research traditions”. Instead of seeking a single confrontation of theories and facts, scientists typically seek to defend their own theories against refutations. Thus, science is not advanced by a single confrontation of “theories” with “facts”, but with defensive attempts by scientists to save their own theories.

In order to distinguish their approach from Lakatos (or Kuhn), King and Sznajder termed it “neo-Lakatosian”. For Lakatos (and Kuhn, at least in the second edition of *Scientific Revolution*,) science progresses as cases accumulate that can or cannot be positively explained by research traditions. But for King and Sznajder (2006:765), “theories can never be disproved – the total rejection of a research tradition (or paradigm) can never be secured by the facts. Rather, other processes or forces determine when a ‘paradigm shift’ or the death of a research tradition occurs”. However, the neo-Lakatosian approach holds that, through careful case selection and paying close attention to the measurement of social mechanisms, social scientists can partially “telescope” scientific progress, even though no single comparative study can decisively prove or disprove a metatheory. Rather than providing decisive negative proof in the Popperian sense, such studies highlight the strengths and weaknesses of theories located in competing research traditions.

**Table 1:** Deaths in Left-wing Extremism In Chhattisgarh and India

| Case         | Deaths in Left-Wing Extremism |      |      |      |      |
|--------------|-------------------------------|------|------|------|------|
|              | 2003                          | 2004 | 2005 | 2006 | 2007 |
| Chhattisgarh | 82                            | 98   | 200  | 462  | 435  |
| India        | 731                           | 653  | 902  | 952  | 837  |

Source: South Asia Terrorism Portal (N.d.a)

In the neo-Lakatosian understanding of the comparative method, social science is advanced most effectively with research on “crucial cases”. Such cases loom larger than others in the intersubjective world of the scientific community. They become battlegrounds for comparing research traditions and metatheories, and judgments are made over time based on the accumulation of empirical studies of these crucial cases. There are two reasons why we believe that the state of Chhattisgarh is a crucial case for furthering our empirical and theoretical understanding of insurgency among indigenous peoples in general, and contemporary Naxalism in India in particular.<sup>5</sup> First, for the past one hundred years Chhattisgarh’s southern region has been an important battleground for understanding India’s tribal people and their relationship with dominant society. This began with British “anthropologist administrators”, such as Elwin (1988) and Grigson (1991), and has continued to the present day with anthropologists such as Sundar (2001a, 2007) and Gell (1997). Second, Chhattisgarh is the epicenter of the Naxalite insurgency. Table 1 indicates that in the past few years Chhattisgarh has accounted for a disproportionate and increasing number of deaths resulting from “left-wing extremism” in India. It seems apparent, therefore, that to understand the most recent wave of rural insurgency in India it is critical to understand the pattern of Naxalite activity in Chhattisgarh.

#### Comparative Analysis at Sub-National Level

The majority of comparative research in the social sciences generally, and study of revolutionary activity specifically, occurs between countries with nation states as cases. However, because most theories of rural insurgency identify sub-national and even sub-regional variation as crucial, we intend to deviate from this well-trodden path by comparing the districts of Chhattisgarh.<sup>6</sup> As such we are comparing within a case, rather than between cases, which is made possible by the

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<sup>5</sup> Chhattisgarh became one of India’s 28 states when it ceded from Madhya Pradesh in 2000. It has a population of 20,833,803 and is 135,191 square kilometers in area (Census of India 2001).

<sup>6</sup> Districts are the administrative level below the state. Until May 2007 Chhattisgarh consisted of sixteen districts, with populations ranging from approximately five hundred thousand to three million (Census of India 2001). From May 2007 onwards two more districts were created, but due to lack of data for these we use the pre-2007 boundaries.

distinct socioeconomic and geographical characteristics of regions within the state.

Our strategy has several advantages. First, the most obvious problem that comparativists encounter is “many variables, small N” (Lijphart 1971:686; Smelser 1973:77). This leads to “causal overdetermination”, as several causal explanations remain tenable after all irrelevant factors have been eliminated (Frendreis 1983:265). This is especially true as there need not be any single cause of a particular outcome (Ragin 1987, 2000). As states are not just objects of revolutionary struggles but are also important actors in the struggle (Skocpol 1982:366), it can be assumed that certain variables regarding the macropolitical opportunity structure in Chhattisgarh will be constant across its districts. This reduces the number of independent variables that need to be considered and partially ameliorates one side of the small N, many variables quandary.

Second, the question of equivalence of concepts is a central issue in comparative studies. The same context-specific concepts may operationalize in distinct ways in different cases (Przeworski and Teune 1970). As some meanings associated with a concept fail to fit new cases, comparative studies can suffer from what Sartori (1970) calls “conceptual stretching”. Concepts such as caste and tribe do not travel well within a country as diverse as India, and do not have equivalents outside of South Asia, making comparative studies that remain sensitive to the particularities of caste and tribe relations very difficult. This problem is markedly reduced when the frame of analysis is limited to Chhattisgarh, because it can be assumed that these concepts remain relatively constant across its districts.

Third, in the dominant inductivist approach to comparative research, cases are selected on the basis of prior expectation that they are either predominately similar or different to one another. By including all districts of Chhattisgarh in our comparative study we do not systematically select cases in such a way that the dependent phenomenon is either invariant or completely variable across cases. This mixed systems strategy makes it possible to compare

and eliminate variables that make the system both similar and different (Freundreis 1983). Thus it allows us to consider negative cases as outcomes that require explanation and study, which enables us to evaluate the sufficiency of causal conditions identified in the study of positive cases. Moreover it removes the necessity for purposive selection based on prior expectations, and therefore increases the external validity of the study.

### Fuzzy Sets as a Method of Comparative Analysis

The neo-Lakatosian approach stands in opposition to the dominant inductivist approach that utilizes Mills method of agreement and/or disagreement, and sees the comparative method as an imperfect substitute for statistical methodology. This claim is based on the belief that the same logic underpins both strategies: they manipulate “groups of cases to control sources variation in order to make causal inferences” (Skocpol and Summers 1980:182; Kalyvas 2006:132), but the number of cases in the comparative approach is too small to permit statistical analysis.

We agree with Burawoy (1989) that those who think of comparative social science as duplicating the logic of statistical inference underestimate the value of comparative social science. Moreover, they overestimate the benefits of statistical analysis, in which cases are reduced to the status of variables with little identity as individual phenomena (Ragin 1987, 2000). Our study considers Chhattisgarh’s sixteen districts and does not produce statistically significant results, but statistical significance is not analogous with substantive significance – especially in the study of conflict (Wickham-Crowley 1991:84). The value of a case study does not simply lie only in the proving or disproving of various macrocausal theories with reference to macrovariables. Studies that utilize the full potential of comparative social science locate themselves within a research tradition by identifying the big independent and dependent variables, but also provide “thick” studies of crucial cases. King and Sznajder (2006:766-7) propose a two-part definition of thick. First, they refer to the intensive understanding of a

historical case – “the historical version of the Geertzian ‘thickness’ of ethnographic accounts: providing multiple voices and piles of evidence”. Second, they refer to the data being extensive; that is, numerous, diverse, of high quality, and at multiple levels of analysis.

The importance of taking a historical perspective in the study of collective action and social movements has been reiterated in two recent articles.<sup>7</sup> First, Shin (1994) argues that prior protest experience contributes to movements by developing consciousness, whether class, political or collective. “Peasants’ experiences in various forms of protest and resistance during the colonial period influenced the course of peasant organization and subsequent mobilization” in the postcolonial period (Shin 2006:1602). Second, Walder (2006:713) points out that both structural and rational actor theories outlined earlier assume individuals choose a course of action in a political context that is stable through time and space. Thus it is held that individuals who occupy similar positions in the structure of power and privilege will make similar choices, regardless of where and when they make them. Walder suggests that, if the political context is ambiguous or rapidly shifting, people in identical social positions will make different choices and end up on different sides in a conflict. Thus, these two articles reiterate the point that, in addition to analyzing different forms of village or agrarian class structure, we must undertake a historically thick study in order to understand the prior protest experience of the population and the specific political contexts in which their choices are made (Walder 2006:740).

To consider all these factors our methods of analysis are threefold. First, we use ethnographic data to operationalize the general hypotheses in the Chhattisgarhi context. Second, we use fuzzy sets to test the hypotheses with quantitative data. This utilizes Boolean algebra to take account of the different possibilities of necessary and sufficient conditions (Ragin 1987, 2000). Third, we complement the identification of correlation between independent and dependent variables in Chhattisgarh’s districts with “thick description” of these districts.

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<sup>7</sup> Shin’s (1994) research relates to the Korean rural uprisings of 1946, while Walder’s (2006) looks at the formation of the Red Guards in Beijing during the Cultural Revolution.

## FUZZY SET ANALYSIS

## The Dependent Variable

Despite being common practice, we argue that citing deaths as an indication of insurgent strength is problematic for two reasons. First, violence is a conceptual minefield and can be defined in ways that go far beyond physical violence. We use a narrow definition of violence as “the deliberate infliction of harm on people” (Kalyvas 2006:19). Thus violent activity includes deaths that result from insurgent attacks on government forces, which are covered in the widely cited Indian Government and Institute for Conflict Management data. In addition we consider the more descriptive reports of Human Rights organizations, which cover violent activity such as insurgent reprisals against suspected collaborators. These sources are to some extent complementary, and by combining them it is possible to establish a reliable – if not precise – indication of the pattern of insurgent violence in Chhattisgarh.

**Table 2:** Stages of Maoist Insurgency

| Stage          | Goal                             | Emphasis  |
|----------------|----------------------------------|---|
| Organizational | Survive and build infrastructure | Gain public support through non-violent activity  |
| Guerrilla      | Shift the balance of power       | Increase public support through non-violent activity and wear down government forces through violent activity |
| Final          | Overthrow the government         | Destroy government forced through violent activity  |

*Source:* Snow (1996, 69).

Second, as demonstrated in table 2, non-violent activity is also a crucial aspect of insurgency – especially in the organizational and guerilla stages. Chakravarti (2008:119) points out “the way to assess Naxalite activity or threat is not [just] by killings. It is by the degree to which they have built an infrastructure, succeeded in mobilizing their front organizations and sympathizers”. Such activities are aimed at increasing popular support and organizational capacity; they include advocating for fair wages and prices for agricultural products, advice on

agricultural practices, literacy and health programs. To determine the extent of non-violent insurgent activity we have consulted a number of sources including our fieldwork observations, government documents and security analyses.

To take account of the contrasting importance of non-violent and violent activity at different stages of insurgency we classify insurgent activity into the following fuzzy sets: (i) districts where there is *no significant insurgent activity* (fuzzy membership = 0), (ii) districts where there is *significant non-violent insurgent activity* (fuzzy membership > 0 but < 0.5), (iii) districts where there is *significant non-violent and some violent insurgent activity* (fuzzy membership > 0.5 but < 1.0), and (iv) districts where there *is significant non-violent and violent insurgent activity* (fuzzy membership = 1.0). This allows us to generate table 3, a Boolean Truth table summing up the comparative study data and the presence or non-presence of conditions.

Table 3: Insurgent Activity in Chhattisgarh: A Boolean Truth Table

| District  | Favourable Conditions                |                                     |                                   |                             |                          |  |                        |                         |                                 |                                       | Outcome |   |
|---|--------------------------------------|-------------------------------------|-----------------------------------|-----------------------------|--------------------------|--|------------------------|-------------------------|---------------------------------|---------------------------------------|---------|---|
|   | (A)<br>Tribal Social<br>Organization | (B)<br>Caste Social<br>Organization | (C)<br>High Population<br>Density | (D)<br>High Forest<br>Cover | (E)<br>Rugged<br>Terrain | (F)<br>Long Distance<br>from State Capital | (G)<br>State<br>Border | (H)<br>State<br>Militia | (I)<br>Influx of<br>non-Tribals | (J)<br>Increase in<br>Mining Revenues |         | (K)<br>Forests Important<br>to Livelihood |
| 1. Dantewara  | A                                    | b                                   | c                                 | D                           | E                        | F  | G                      | H                       | i                               | J                                     | K       | I   |
| 2. Bastar   | A                                    | b                                   | c                                 | D                           | E                        | F  | G                      | b                       | i                               | J                                     | K       | > 0.5 but < 1                             |
| 3. Jaspur   | A                                    | b                                   | c                                 | D                           | E                        | F  | G                      | b                       | i                               | J                                     | K       | > 0.5 but < 1                             |
| 4. Kanker   | A                                    | b                                   | c                                 | D                           | E                        | F  | G                      | b                       | i                               | J                                     | K       | > 0.5 but < 1                             |
| 5. Surjuga  | A                                    | b                                   | c                                 | D                           | E                        | F  | G                      | b                       | i                               | J                                     | K       | > 0.5 but < 1                             |
| (i) Significant Violent and Non-Violent Insurgent Activity  |                                      |                                     |                                   |                             |                          |  |                        |                         |                                 |                                       |         |   |
| 6. Kabirdham  | a                                    | B                                   | c                                 | d                           | E                        | f  | G                      | b                       | i                               | J                                     | K       | > 0 but < 0.5                             |
| 7. Koriya   | a                                    | B                                   | c                                 | D                           | E                        | F  | G                      | b                       | i                               | J                                     | K       | > 0 but < 0.5                             |
| 8. Rajnandgaon  | a                                    | B                                   | C                                 | D                           | E                        | f  | G                      | b                       | i                               | J                                     | K       | > 0 but < 0.5                             |
| (ii) Violent and Significant Non-Violent Insurgent Activity |                                      |                                     |                                   |                             |                          |  |                        |                         |                                 |                                       |         |   |
| (iii) Significant Non-Violent Insurgent Activity            |                                      |                                     |                                   |                             |                          |  |                        |                         |                                 |                                       |         |   |
| 9. Bilaspur   | a                                    | B                                   | C                                 | d                           | E                        | f  | G                      | b                       | i                               | J                                     | k       | 0   |
| 10. Dhamtari  | a                                    | B                                   | C                                 | D                           | e                        | f  | G                      | b                       | i                               | J                                     | k       | 0   |
| 11. Durg  | a                                    | B                                   | C                                 | d                           | e                        | f  | G                      | b                       | i                               | J                                     | k       | 0   |
| 12. Janjgir   | a                                    | B                                   | C                                 | d                           | e                        | f  | G                      | b                       | i                               | J                                     | k       | 0   |
| 13. Korba   | a                                    | B                                   | C                                 | D                           | E                        | F  | G                      | b                       | i                               | J                                     | K       | 0   |
| 14. Mahasamund  | a                                    | B                                   | C                                 | d                           | e                        | f  | G                      | b                       | i                               | J                                     | K       | 0   |
| 15. Raigarh   | a                                    | B                                   | C                                 | D                           | e                        | F  | G                      | b                       | i                               | J                                     | k       | 0   |
| 16. Raipur  | a                                    | B                                   | C                                 | D                           | e                        | f  | G                      | b                       | i                               | J                                     | K       | 0   |
| (iv) Insignificant Insurgent Activity                       |                                      |                                     |                                   |                             |                          |  |                        |                         |                                 |                                       |         |   |

Notes: Trait absent = lower case, Trait present = UPPER CASE, Condition relevant = **Bold**. (R relevant means that the variable did not drop out in the process of Boolean minimization.)  
 Sources: Census of India (1991, 2001), Government of Chhattisgarh (2001, 2005, 2006), Government of India (2003), Bhatt and Bhargava (2005).

The analysis in table 3 is summed up in Boolean shorthand in table 4.

**Table 4:** Patterns of Variables Resulting from Boolean Minimalization

| Outcome       |  | Patterns of Variables  |
|---------------|--|------------------------|
| 1             | Significant Violent and Non-Violent Insurgent Activity | AbcDEFGHK              |
| > 0.5 but < 1 | Violent and Significant Non-Violent Insurgent Activity | AbcDEFGhK <sup>a</sup> |
| > 0 but < 0.5 | Significant Non-Violent Insurgent Activity             | aBcDEGhiK <sup>b</sup> |
| 0             | Insignificant Insurgent Activity                       | aBCh                   |

*Notes:* There are several anomalies included in this table. In doing this we have followed Ragin's (1987:98) advice that Boolean algebra should be applied thoughtfully rather than mechanically.

<sup>a</sup> Kanker is "fg" (neither a long distance from the state capital nor on a state border). This can be explained by the fact that Kanker was until 1999 part of a united Bastar district that also included Bastar and Dantewara, and continues to have strong links with these two districts – both of which are a long distance from the state capital and on a state border.

<sup>b</sup> Rajnandgaon is "C" (has high populations density), but has significantly lower population density in peripheral areas where insurgent activity occurs. Kabirdham is "d" (has low forest cover), but while 24% of Kabirdham's area is covered by forest, the forest cover is higher in areas where insurgent activity occurs.

When expressed in prose rather than letters, we can make the following observations. Districts where there is *significant violent and non-violent activity*, and *violent and significant non-violent activity* display similar patterns of variables. *Significant violent and significant non-violent activity* occurs in the one district where the social structure is tribal rather than caste-based, the geography is suited to guerrilla warfare, the anti-insurgent militia are active and the forests are important for people's livelihoods. *Violent and non-violent activity* occurs in districts that display all the features outlined above, except the active anti-insurgent militia. This indicates these two outcomes are qualitatively similar, and it is the presence of the militia that determines the extent of violent activity.

The pattern of variables that leads to the outcome *significant non-violent activity* is distinct from the other outcomes that involve insurgent activity. *Significant non-violent activity* occurs in districts where the social structure is caste-based rather than tribal, the geographical features are suited to guerrilla warfare, and the forests are important for people's livelihoods.

These districts share similar geographic conditions – with the exception of being closer to the state capital – to those in the previous paragraph, but have predominately caste-based rather than tribal socioeconomic structure. Districts where there is *insignificant insurgent activity* have caste-based socioeconomic structure, geographical conditions unfavourable to guerrilla activities and the forests are not important to the livelihood of the population.

#### WHICH RURAL INHABITANTS ARE PRONE TO INSURGENCY, AND WHY?

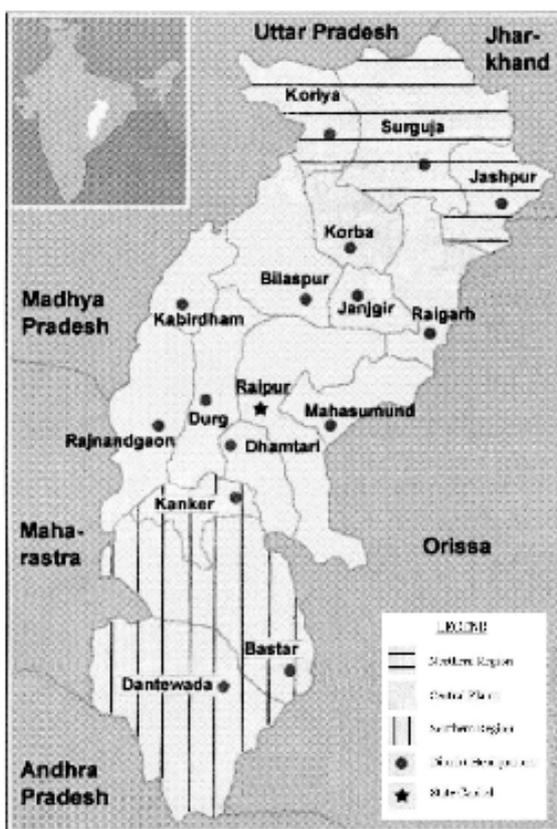


Figure 1: Map of Chhattisgarh

*Adivasis* (Scheduled Tribes) account for 31.8% of Chhattisgarh's population compared to the national average of 8.3% (Census of India 2001),<sup>8</sup> but the state is home to a diverse range of communities that have distinct socioeconomic structures. Chhattisgarh can be divided into three

<sup>8</sup> "Scheduled Tribes" are explicitly colonial and political constructions (Bayly 1995; Galanter 1984). Despite the fact that a great deal of research has been directed against these constructions (Appadurai 1993; Cohn 1990), they have outlived the colonial regime and been internalized by Indian society. Thus, they continue to determine the questions asked by researchers, as well as the self-perception of those being researched.

distinct regions (see figure 1). The northern region and the southern region have few urban centers and limited industry, are predominately hilly, densely forested, and sparsely populated – chiefly by indigenous tribes. *Adivasis* do not constitute a homogenous group within India or Chhattisgarh. In fact the Government of Chhattisgarh recognizes forty-two distinct Scheduled Tribes. Nevertheless, *adivasis* display what Needham (1975) termed “polythetic” features, or what Wittgenstein referred to as “*Familienähnlichkeit*” (family resemblance or likeness). They share a set of characterizing but not necessarily unique features, such as low technology forms of agriculture and partial integration into the dominant nation state, which distinguishes them from the “mainstream” Indian society. The central plains region displays markedly different geographical, economic and social features. It is densely populated, has several notable industrial centers, and is an important agricultural area known as the “rice bowl” of Central India (Government of Chhattisgarh 2005:9). In comparison to the northern and southern regions, land tends to be well irrigated, intensively farmed, and tilled by wage laborers. The socioeconomic structure is predominately caste-based, with a far lower proportion of *adivasis*. As such it is quite typical of mainstream rural areas in Northern India.

Gell (1997:433) asserts that caste-based society can be understood as “three-dimensionally hierarchical”; the extraction of rents and land-revenue from the rural masses is supported “a dense screen of social barriers and material relationships of clientship and extraction [which] intervened between the very high and the very low, creating the minutely nuanced, infinitely graduated, social hierarchy” (ibid:433-4). Lower caste rural inhabitants in the central region share several important features with Paige’s sharecroppers and landless laborers. Cultivation tends to be low technology and labor-intensive – mainly tending paddy fields by hand. Thus the higher caste landowners have nothing but their claim on the land itself as the basis of their domination. Lower caste rural inhabitants are class conscious because they exist in an agrarian system that generates intense class conflict over land and the surplus produced on that

land, and in which they suffer, along with their colleagues in the area, from the same grievances at the hands of the landowning upper castes.

In contrast Gell (1997:433-4) describes tribal societies as “two dimensionally hierarchical” or “hierarchically flat” as they are “founded on the stark opposition of ordinary subjects (the tribes) and the King and his court”. In precolonial and colonial times they were distinguished by underdeveloped revenue extraction and the absence of intermediary layers between the tribal cultivator and the King. Sundar (2007:6) argues that despite the insertion of tribal areas into the capitalist framework, relations of production have not been totally transformed into capitalist ones. The Government of Chhattisgarh (2005:204) estimates that in Dantewara – the district with the highest tribal population – 40% of income comes from the forest, 30% from agriculture, 15% from animal husbandry and 15% from wage labor. The forest provides a multitude of natural products that are gathered and used for food, fuel, medicines, buildings materials, alcohol, as well as being sold for cash. From June to January the main source of livelihood is small-scale rain-fed mono-crop cultivation in forest clearings, primarily of rice for self-consumption. *Adivasis* undertake wage labor for government departments or contractors, but this tends to be occasional and directed towards raiding the cash economy in order to supplement the family landholding.

In contrast to caste-based areas, where demographic pressures are quite intense, in the tribal regions land tends to plentiful and labor scarce. The proportion of landless laborers tend to be considerably lower and average landholdings tend to be between three and five hectares, whereas in predominately caste-based areas they are nearer one (Government of Chhattisgarh 2005:202-42). *Adivasis* do not have private property in a form that can be conceptualized using orthodox discourse on property rights; their understanding falls somewhere between open access, pure private ownership and state ownership. *Adivasis* cultivate land that is privately owned by their family unit. Most villages have shared grazing lands and it is common that all members of

the community are allowed to gather produce from any tree – albeit often only in the afternoon when there is less produce on the ground. Legally speaking, land can be bought and sold by members of the *adivasi* community, but this seldom happens. Non-*adivasis* are prohibited from buying land in tribal areas by law, although there are legal mechanisms that allow the government to purchase tribal land for “public purpose”. In addition to the small amount of land that is privately owned, the *adivasis* are accorded certain privileges to collect produce from the vast majority of forest that is reserved or protected by the state.

While some observers refer to Chhattisgarh’s *adivasi* population as “Paleolithic” hunter-gatherers (Bhatt and Bhargava 2005:67), we argue that they should be conceptualized as “peasants”. They conform to Marx’s (1987) definition of small landowners who are subordinate within the prevailing mode of production. They also display characteristic features outlined by Wolf (1966:1-11). First, their relationship to the state demonstrates that they are subject to the demands and sanctions of power holders outside of their immediate community. Second, while they grow rice for self-consumption, their collection of forest produce is geared towards exchange and gain in addition to subsistence.

Sundar (2007:24) has pointed out that at village level, kinship and relations of subordination are a characteristic of tribal socioeconomic structure. Traditionally the founding lineage, and the headman and earth priest who invariably came from that lineage, hold dominant positions. Their power stems from their supposed ability to mediate with the local gods, but this is now overlaid with economic standing, political affiliations and government positions. Acknowledging this does not, however, undermine the argument that as a result of owning their land, directly controlling the immediate processes of economic production, having strong communal traditions and few sharp internal class divisions, Chhattisgarh’s *adivasis* have markedly higher levels of organizational autonomy and communal solidarity than lower caste rural inhabitants. It is a central assertion of our analysis that landowning middle peasant and the

proletarianized sharecropper or landless laborer – the two ideal types outlined in the moral economy and class conflict approaches – correspond quite closely to the lower echelons of rural society that predominate in the tribal northern and southern regions and the caste-based central plains region respectively. Thus in the Chhattisgarhi context hypotheses one and two can be reformulated as:

HYPOTHESIS 1.– *Rural inhabitants are most likely to be involved in insurgent activity where the socioeconomic structure is predominately tribal rather than caste-based.*

HYPOTHESIS 2.– *Rural inhabitants are most likely to be involved in insurgent activity in areas where the socioeconomic structure is predominately caste-based rather than tribal.*

The fuzzy sets analysis indicates that districts where the socioeconomic structure is predominately tribal experience violent insurgent activity, while those districts where social structure is predominately caste-based do not experience violent insurgent activity. This pattern indicates that hypothesis 1 – generated from the moral economy approach of Wolf and Scott – is more useful in helping us understand violent insurgent activity in Chhattisgarh than hypothesis 2, which is based on the class analyses of Paige. This suggests that the insurrectionary capacities of Chhattisgarh's *adivasis* are, in part, a result of the greater organizational autonomy and communal solidarity afforded by tribal social structure.

Our analysis also allows us to determine whether *adivasis*' tribal social structure, or the fact that they tend to live in areas that are suited to insurgency, is more important in explaining insurgent activity. The third hypothesis predicts that revolutionary activity will occur in areas that are suited to guerilla warfare. If this hypothesis is true, insurgent activity will occur in sparsely populated, densely forested, mountainous areas far from the state capital but close to administrative boundaries. The national government with national defense and foreign affairs, but law and order, under which the insurgency falls, is the responsibility of state governments. It is suggested that state borders allow the insurgents to take full advantage of the bureaucratic

intransigence of state authorities, who are happy to pass responsibility for law and order on to their colleagues in the neighboring jurisdiction. Thus we reformulate the third hypothesis as:

**HYPOTHESIS 3.**— *Rural inhabitants are most likely to be involved in insurgent activity in sparsely populated, densely forested, mountainous areas far from the state capital but close to administrative boundaries.*

Our research indicates that all districts that experience *significant violent insurgent activity* have geographical features that are suited to guerrilla warfare, but not all districts that have suitable geographies experience *significant violent insurgent activity*. This suggests that while physical and political geographic features limit where violent insurgent activity can take place, they do not determine where it does take place. Factors concerning social structure – in particular whether a district has a large *adivasi* population or not – appear to determine where, out of all the areas in which it is geographically possible, violent insurgent activity occurs. It does, however, appear that geographical features are more important in the formative stages of the insurgency. The fuzzy sets analysis indicates that districts where there is *significant non-violent insurgent activity* and those where there is *insignificant insurgent activity* both have predominately caste-based socioeconomic structure. The critical difference between the two groups is that those districts that experience *significant non-violent insurgent activity* have geographical features that are more suited to insurgency.

Our analysis raises an interesting side issue. Dantewara – the only district that experiences *significant violent and non-violent insurgent activity* has geopolitical and social structural features that are extremely suited to insurgent activity. As Gupta (2006:3175) has pointed out Dantewara is not “the typical Indian countryside”; it is on a “tri-state border”, its district headquarters is the furthest distance from the state capital, and it is by far the most sparsely populated and densely forested district. Moreover, it has the highest percentage of *adivasis* [almost 79% of the population are Scheduled Tribes (Census of India 2001)] of any

district, and its indigenous population is among “the most marginal people of the country” (Balgopal 2006:2183). Dantewara, and the contiguous area over the state border in Andhra Pradesh, has been a haven for insurgents for almost four decades, and remains the one district in Chhattisgarh that can genuinely be regarded as a “liberated area” or “guerilla base”, “where an incipient state of the future has been or is declared to have been established, forcing out the existing state” (ibid). The peripheral areas are under insurgent control, inaccessible to government forces, and act as a base for violent activity in the whole southern region. It appears that this unique geographic and socioeconomic profile provides the insurgent with overwhelming advantages over the state, and has allowed them to establish a guerilla base in the area.

#### WHAT ROLES DO POLITICAL AND MILITARY ORGANIZATIONS PLAY IN RURAL INSURGENCIES?

An analysis of the insurgent movement at the national level can, to some extent, further our understanding of the pattern of rural insurgency. In September 2004 the two dominant groups of Maoists in India, CPI (Marxist-Leninist) People’s War (PWG) and Maoist Communist Centre India (MCCI), merged to form the CPI (Maoist), which is by far the strongest Naxalite organization in the country. This was the first time that India’s Maoist insurgents had been united in thirty-seven years. Previously the PWG controlled the southern region of Chhattisgarh, while the MCCI controlled the northern region. After the merger resources have been concentrated on the base area in Dantewara – and this goes some way to explaining why violence in this district in particular, and the southern region in general, is disproportionately higher than in the north region (Chakravarti 2008:91).

At the national level the insurgent’s long-term strategy is orthodox Maoist. The CPI (Maoist) Central Committee (quoted in Banarjee 2006:3160) acknowledge that “the forest and mountainous areas quite naturally get priority as these are strategic areas where base areas can be

set up”. From here the insurgents can “arouse, organise and arm the vast peasant masses on the basic slogan of agrarian revolution” before spreading to “the other areas and thereby ultimately encircling the cities from the countryside”. The strategy of the Naxalite leadership does not fit neatly into either the moral economist or the class analysis approaches. While their language is littered with references to “class struggle”, it is in broader terms than those envisaged by Paige, and usually aimed at condemning “the imperialist sponsored policies being pursued by the ruling classes [that] are devastating the lives of the already impoverished masses” [CPI (Maoist) (2007)]. The insurgents are open to forming alliances with *adivasis*, lower caste rural inhabitants or more or less anyone else who is opposed to what they see as class enemies. CPI (Maoist) General Secretary Ganapathy (2007) sees their support base as “the workers, peasants, middle class, *dalits*, women, *adivasis* and all the toiling millions upon millions of masses... [but] not the fatty upper layer of five or ten per cent of the society”.

At the local levels the insurgent movement can be divided into two groups. *Sanghams* (meetings) are members of, and live within, the community. Typically every village where the insurgents are active has a *sangham* of ten to twelve people. Their activities are non-violent and include advocacy for fair wages and prices for agricultural and forest produce. *People’s March*, the Naxalite journal, claims they have engaged in considerable development projects over the past twenty years, such as building schools, medical centers, fishponds and orchards, as well as promoting local language and literature (Sudhakar 2006:1-7). *Sanghams* also provide support to the *dalams* (guerilla squads), which undertake military operations. The latter consist of approximately twenty men and women who live deep in the jungle, away from villages; typically five or six members are from outside the region – and these tend to be better educated and more in tune with the ideology espoused at the national level – while the rest are local.

*Dalams’* violent activities perform a number of functions. It is important to distinguish between those that have a military objective, such as attacking the enemy in order to seize guns,

and those that aim to improve the insurgents' standing among the local population. The latter, especially the manner in which the insurgents protect the *adivasi* communities from outside forces, is of particular interest to this study. *Dalams* hold *Jan Adalats* (peoples' courts) in which they take up specific cases of exploitation; these include suspected police informers, political party activists, foresters and contractors not paying minimum wage, schoolteachers not attending school, local government officials demanding bribes, and government physicians not attending their clinic and making money through private practice instead (Sundar 2007:271). These "exploiters" are made to admit their guilt – with force if needed – then submitted to quick and often brutal "justice". In terms of people affected, *Jan Adalats* make up a small proportion of violence encompassed in *violent insurgent activity*. Nevertheless, it is significant because it occurs within, is seen by, and sends a message to *adivasi* communities.

There has been some debate as to whether the insurgents' violent or non-violent activities are primarily responsible for their support base among Chhattisgarh's *adivasis* (Bhatia 2006:3182; Sagar 2006:3177). We contend that the distinction between violent and non-violent activity is not as straightforward as either side assumes. The insurgent organization is primarily a political rather than a military institution, and its aim is to create *Janathana Sarkar* (People's Governments). The insurgents challenge the state's monopoly of violence, which results in a situation of dual or multiple sovereignty (Tilly 1978:190-3). This supports Kalyvas' (2006:218) assertion that insurgency is a process of competitive statebuilding rather than just collective action or social contention. Even when insurgents cannot hope to seize the state at the national level they attempt to secure power at the local level. To this end the insurgents undertake development projects, collect taxes, redistribute land, administer justice and conscript fighters. These activities are not necessarily violent, but are only effective when backed up by the credible threat of violence. Weber (1994:310) argued that violence is "not the normal or sole means used by the state", but that the relation between the two "is a particularly intimate one". He (ibid:310-

11) understands the state as a “human community which (successfully) lays claim to the *monopoly of legitimate use of physical force* within a certain territory” (original emphasis). Thus, as Mao famously pointed out, “political power grows out of the barrel of a gun”.

The insurgency is conducted through the people or, in Mao’s aphorism, the people are for insurgents what water is to fish. Passive acceptance of the insurgents’ authority by a significant proportion of the local population is required because, without the secure hiding places, reliable intelligence and material resources that only they can provide, the insurgents would not be able to survive in the jungle. Non-violent and violent activities are aimed at promoting the interests of poor *adivasis*, and consequently poor *adivasis* tend to actively support the insurgents. Thus, whether one supports the insurgents or not depends on one’s position in the structure of power and privilege, which indicates the conflict is fought between broad socioeconomic groups rather than aggregations of rational, utility-maximizing individuals.

#### Case study of Dantewara

The theoretical issues highlighted by Popkin can be best examined in the context of Dantewara. Since 2005 the district’s population has had the unenviable choice between *two* competing political entrepreneurs, the Naxalite insurgents and the government-sponsored militia *Salwa Judum*.<sup>9</sup> The strategy of *Salwa Judum* is typical of counter-insurgency movements and follows the same logic as American operations in Vietnam. They arrive in a targeted village accompanied by security forces, ask *sangham* members to surrender, order the other residents to pack their belongings and herd them into fortified roadside camps, which act as “strategic hamlets”. The aim is to forcibly clear the jungles of inhabitants in order to deprive the insurgents of their support base – or, to extend Mao’s analogy, to deprive the fish of water.

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<sup>9</sup> *Salwa Judum* is described by the Dantewara District Collector (High Court of Chhattisgarh 2007) as a “spontaneous movement of villagers started with the sole objective of countering the atrocities... against the community at large by Naxalite extremists”. The weight of evidence, however, points to it being an “organised, state-managed enterprise” (People's Union of Civil Liberties, 2006; also see Guha *et al* 2006:14-20).

The formation of *Salwa Judum* changed the state's counter-insurgent strategy from containment to pro-active forest clearance. It amounted to the introduction of a new political entrepreneur to Dantewara, brought about a rapid change in the political context, and had several important consequences. First, it has resulted in an escalation of violence as the district was transformed from a guerilla base into a war zone. The marked increase in “Deaths in Left-Wing Extremism” in Chhattisgarh between 2005 and 2006 in table 1, the disproportionate and rising number of “Deaths in Major Incidences” occurring in Dantewara in table 5, and the fact that Dantewara is the only district where there is *significant violent insurgent activity*, are all primarily due to the introduction of *Salwa Judum*.

**Table 5:** District-wise Deaths in “Major Incidences” of Left-Wing Extremism in Chhattisgarh, 2005-2007

| Case      | Deaths in Major Incidences of Left-Wing Extremism |      |      |
|-----------|---|------|------|
|           | 2005  | 2006 | 2007 |
| Bastar    | 7   | 3    | 15   |
| Dantewara | 59  | 160  | 178  |
| Jashpur   | -   | 3    | -    |
| Kanker    | -   | 17   | 11   |
| Surjuga   | 3   | -    | -    |
| Total     | 69  | 183  | 204  |

Source: South Asia Terrorism Portal (N.d.b)

Second, the presence of two competing political entrepreneurs has led to the polarization of society. Before the formation of *Salwa Judum* the range of options available to inhabitants of insurgent controlled areas was to either support the insurgents or to silently dissent. Inhabitants must now actively support – and seek the protection of – either the Naxalites or *Salwa Judum*, because if they do not openly support one side they are presumed to support the other. The Chief Minister of Chhattisgarh (quoted in Balgopal 2006:2184) declared that “those in the camps are with the government while those in the forests are with the Maoists”. People who obey *Salwa*

*Judum* and relocate to the camps are seen by the Naxalites as counter-insurgents, and those who defy *Salwa Judum* and remain outside the camps are regarded by government forces as insurgents (Sundar 2007:279-82). 644 villages – over half the total in Dantewara – have been forcibly evacuated by *Salwa Judum*, and 50,000 people are currently in roadside camps (Guha *et al* 2006:34; Sundar 2007:265). The total district population was almost 720,000 in 2001 (Census of India), and if half of all villages were evacuated we would expect, after taking into account the district's three towns, over 300,000 to be displaced. The 250,000 unaccounted for people remain in insurgent controlled territory unbothered by the insurgents or have fled to neighboring districts and states.

It is enlightening to ask why some people decide to move to *Salwa Judum* camps while others refuse? It is sometimes said disparagingly that *Salwa Judum* are a group of non-*adivasi* traders who have teamed up with the Indian state to fight the *adivasi* Naxalites (Chakravarti 2008:263). Many *Salwa Judum* leaders are non-*adivasi* traders from the Hindi heartland of Northern India who have realized that there is money and influence to be gained from supporting the government militia. But significant numbers of *adivasis* are also involved with *Salwa Judum* at various levels and there are large numbers of *adivasis* living in the squalid roadside camps run by *Salwa Judum*. We must explain why this is the case. Rural insurgencies tend to hurt, alienate and humiliate certain sections of the population – just as they empower others. The Naxalites are no different; while their policies uplift the lowliest members of *adivasi* society, they threaten the influence of established elites. Consequently, *Salwa Judum* represents the interests of those sections of *adivasi* and non-*adivasi* society who have reason to resist or fear the insurgents. Such *adivasis* are overwhelmingly those who previously held positions of authority. This includes *kotwars*, the traditional administrators in the village who have a reputation for demanding bribes for services such as registering births, and *sarpanches*, the elected community leaders who are reputed to embezzle a proportion of money from government projects. *Adivasi* teachers and forest

guards are also seen by the insurgents as agents of the dominant state.

Interestingly *patels* – the traditional village leader and usually the head of the founding lineage – tend to side with the insurgents rather than *Salwa Judum*. This indicates that traditional power relations are not a source of conflict. Rather, it is changes in the nature of social relations brought about by the increased penetration of the state and market into tribal areas that is problematic. This allows some villagers to gain new powers, which have not developed organically within *adivasi* society and are not sanctioned by *adivasi* society. These new powers are the consequence of collaboration with a state that is alien to, and in many ways conflicts with, the *adivasi* worldview and belief system. Those people who support *Salwa Judum* tend to have benefited from collaboration with the dominant state, while those who support the Naxalites tend to have suffered as result of it. This is corroborated by Sundar's (2007:274) observation that *majhi* (headman of several villages) who were appointed by the government are more likely to side with *Salwa Judum* than those whose powers evolved out of clan formation.

We have demonstrated that the options available to rural inhabitants in Dantewara were very different depending on whether it was before or after the introduction of *Salwa Judum*. The consequent shift in political context led to the realignment of allegiances of some members of society and intensification of others. *Adivasis* that had previously sympathized with or actively supported the insurgents continued to do so. Non-*adivasi* traders who had formerly made money from trading with insurgents instead supported *Salwa Judum* because they could accumulate more money and power. Contractors who had tolerated the insurgents and paid them bribes because there was no other choice, and *adivasis* who has suffered as a result of the insurgency but had previously had no one to take up their cause, threw their lot in with *Salwa Judum*.

But, does it follow that factional identities are – as Walder (2006:733) argues – emergent properties that change with political context? Is the class configuration of the insurgency blurred because, due to the rapidly shifting political context, people in identical social positions make

different choices at different times and end up on different sides (Walder 2006:738; also see Kalyvas 2006:136-7)? Our analysis suggests that some pre-*Salwa Judum* allegiances were changeable and allowed actors to realign their allegiances when the political context altered. Thus, when the arrival of *Salwa Judum* altered the structure of opportunities, those sections of society opposed to the insurgency were able to reallocate their support – regardless of their pre-*Salwa Judum* allegiances. Traders and contractors who had colluded with the insurgents, as well as *adivasis* who silently opposed the insurgency, were able to change sides and became the leaders and supporters of *Salwa Judum*. This led to an intensification of the division between non-*adivasis* and *adivasi* collaborators on the one hand, and non-collaborating *adivasis* on the other. Consequently we should not place too much emphasis on the political context; it is not important in isolation, but in the way that it interacts with preexisting social identities. The different choices people made after the formation of *Salwa Judum* were a consequence of their positions in the pre-*Salwa Judum* status order.

The fourth hypothesis predicted that rural inhabitants support an insurgent organization because they expect to gain personally from their involvement. If this is true, insurgency will emerge and grow in areas where outside organizations – acting as political entrepreneurs – offer exchanges that are attractive to the rational peasant. In such a situation individual calculation rather than larger group attachments would be the most important reason for siding with either the insurgents or the anti-insurgent militia. Thus we reformulate hypothesis four as:

*HYPOTHESIS 4.– Adivasis will actively choose to support either the insurgents or Salwa Judum because they expect to gain personally from their involvement.*

Our analysis indicates that, while outside political and military organizations are important, they only act as a catalyst for preexisting conflicts. They may influence when and how the conflict emerges as an insurgency, but they do not actually change its faultlines. The hostilities occur between large socioeconomic groupings, but it is too simplistic to conceptualize

the conflict in Chhattisgarh as an *adivasi* insurgency against the dominant non-*adivasi* Indian state. Rather, we argue that Naxalism should be understood as an insurgency against a “bridgehead” (Galtung 1971:81) representing the interests of the dominant state and its capitalists in *adivasi* areas. The bridgehead is an informal bloc consisting of non-*adivasis*, as well as *adivasi* collaborators who benefit from their association at the expense of their broader community. The non-*adivasi* element consists of self-employed traders, representatives of big business, government bureaucrats, forest guards, teachers, armed forces and police. *Adivasi* collaborators may fill any of the aforementioned roles, or may be local politicians and administrators whose power has not developed organically within *adivasi* society, but through collusion with the bridgehead.

Consequently Popkin’s political economy model faces several problems when applied to the insurgency in Chhattisgarh. First it seems futile to seek a rigorous distinction between self-interest and other kinds of interest; people can and do identify with a variety of interests, and to attempt to partition these into either selfishness or altruism obscures the analysis. Second, Popkin’s model emphasizes individual choice; individual rural inhabitants choose from a number of options on the basis of rational calculation aimed at maximizing expected utility. In Dantewara, however, individuals make their personal cost-benefit analysis on the basis of which organization offers the best opportunity for their survival. While it can be argued that living is a localized and selective incentive, a choice between life and death does not display the range of options that political economists envisage. Third, the rational choice model fails to acknowledge the fact that choice is deeply rooted in one’s position in the structure of *adivasi* society. While we are not arguing for class determinism, it seems apparent that, at the least, an analysis that utilizes Bourdieu’s concept of the *habitus* is better suited to explain their choices. This would acknowledge that while the individual can choose whether to support the insurgents or *Salwa Judum*, these choices are limited and strongly influenced by the socioeconomic context in which

the individual is embedded.

#### DOES IMPERIALISM CAUSE RURAL INSURGENCY – AND IF SO, HOW?

The moral economy explanations emphasized both expanding capitalism and state bureaucracy as conditions that encouraged rural insurgency, but the relationship between them is not self-evident. The interests and objectives of the state and capitalists are not analogous as in Polanyi's "Market Society", nor does the state necessarily act at the behest of capitalists in the manner that Lenin or Luxemburg envisaged. In fact, states are motivated by fundamentally different logics of power to those of capitalists; the former are interested in increasing their command over territories, peoples and resources, while the latter are interested in proletarianizing rural inhabitants, setting up favorable exchange relations, and commodifying the factors of production (Chibber 2004). Nevertheless, the outcome of these separate objectives frequently coincide; capitalists desire to expand into new regions for which they require the state's support, and the state needs resources controlled by capitalists to increase its power.

Thus, while each has an interest in expansion, this is the outcome of the complex and sometimes contradictory relationship between capitalist and political logics of power. We refer to this expansion, and the consequent relationships of dominance, as imperialism; in doing so we take a broader view of imperialism than most social scientists who tend to limit their definitions to relationships between states. We see no reason why imperialism should not be used to refer to the process by which the state-capitalist alliance of one distinct geographic and social entity within a "plural society" expands and dominates another distinct geographic and social entity.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> By "plural society" Furnivall (1948) referred to a national society in which atomized groups only interact for economic reasons and do not exist as a common social unit. While this does not characterize the nature of horizontal relationships between different castes, it is a useful way of conceptualizing the relationship between *adivasi* and dominant societies in India.

## Surplus Extraction in the Colonial Era

The *adivasi* worldview is based upon a symbiotic relationship with nature, and the economics of limit and balance. Precisely because *adivasis* have eschewed the mass exploitation of natural resources that characterizes modern industrial society, the areas in which they live tend to have large amounts of natural resources. The presence of these resources, and the question of access to what is the *adivasis*' means of subsistence and production, has fundamentally influenced the nature of *adivasi*-state relations in the colonial and postcolonial eras.

Before the colonial encounter there was a “mutual symbiosis” between the *adivasis* and Hindu traders, who exchanged salt and cloth for forest produce (Sundar 2007:46). While non-*adivasis* coveted the resources in tribal areas, they exercised insufficient political power to forcibly extract them. This changed with the arrival of the East India Company, which systematically set about acquiring control over India's natural resources. Timber became an increasingly valuable commodity, and in order to facilitate its exploitation the British used bureaucratic and legal means to transform local societies and keep *adivasis* out of the forests. The rule of law was marketed as a generous gift from the Empire to its backward subjects, while in fact it recast patterns of ownership and rights to common resources in a manner that was detrimental to the indigenous population.

This is illustrated by two pieces of colonial legislation, which were passed with a view to increasing forest revenue, and thus restricting *adivasis*' access to their natural resources. First, the Forest Act of 1878 gave the state the right to “reserve” – expropriate, administer, and keep *adivasis* out of – all forests in colonial India. It was not until the last decade of the nineteenth century that the Forest Act was applied to the southern region, but between 1891 and 1910 one third of all forest was reserved (Sundar 2001a:24). A Forest Officer, writing in 1905, lucidly sums up the colonial motivation for this legislation: “the main objective of the reservation of these areas is the setting aside of them for the production of heavy timber for export purposes

only... to gain these ends, outside destructive influences must be kept out, therefore people of the state must generally find their wants elsewhere than from the reserves” (Sundar 2007:114-5). But, from the perspective of *adivasis*, for whom the forests were their primary means of subsistence, reservation imposed a system that restricted their way of life and alienated them from their land.

Second, from 1889 the state began to regulate the collection of forest products, which provided *adivasis* with food, fuel, medicines, building materials and alcohol, as well as traded with itinerant non-*adivasi* merchants. It granted monopolies to outside traders and imposed duties on personal consumption. This had two consequences. First, it severed *adivasi* gatherers’ links with traders and local artisans, and forced them to do business with monopsonist traders on terms dictated by the latter (Sundar 2007:111). Second, *adivasis* had to pay for items that they had previously been accustomed to taking by right, and since they could not instantly change to suit these new laws they became classified by the colonial state as offenders. As a Forest Guard told the anthropologist-administrator Elwin (1988:115) in the 1930s, “our laws are of such a kind that every villager breaks one... every day of his life”.

The southern region experienced a series of “tribal” rebellions over the last two centuries, and it is widely argued that these were the result of conflict over access to forest resources (Bhatt and Bhargava 2005:18-28; Sundar 2007:154).<sup>11</sup> Sundar (2001a:20) suggests that, while acknowledging commonalities across time, we should search for a historically specific account of each rebellion. For example the 1876 rebellion drew mainly from the areas around the capital Jagdalpur, which had borne the brunt of attempts to increase surplus extraction, predominately in the form of *begar pratha* (forced labor) as a result of the influx of officials, policemen and foresters. The 1910 rebellion was a response to increased surplus extraction in the form of forest reservation. Five years earlier the state had revealed plans to reserve two thirds of

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<sup>11</sup> There were many other violent outbreaks from 1774 onwards, all of which appear to be related in some way to the intrusion of outside forces into the region; first the Marathas, then the British and finally the Indian state (Bhatt and Bhargava 2005:18-28). The last outbreak before the arrival of the Naxalites was led by the ex-Maharaja in the 1960s and called for land, access to the forests and cheaper rice (Guha 2007:3307-8; Sundar 2007:191-233).

Bastar's forest and the rebellion drew its supporters from precisely those areas in which the reservation had taken place. The houses of officials, traders and police stations – all associated with the colonial state – were robbed and burned (Sundar 2006:3188). It is interesting to note that the 1910 rebellion was popularly referred to as the *Bhumkal*. This term refers to the social solidarity that binds members of a clan to each other and to their specific *bhum* or earth, as well as the political authority of the council of elders. Sundar (2007:133) suggests that “one might read the *Bhumkal* as a mode of protest juridicially sanctioned by local authority, that of the elders in the name of the earth, a pitting of indigenous law against colonial law”.

#### *Adivasis* and the independent Indian state

On paper, the provisions of the fifth schedule of the Indian constitution protect adivasis' rights to their land and permit them a certain degree of political autonomy. In practice, growing trends towards centralization at state and national level have been accompanied by the continued imposition of bureaucratic and legal systems that conflict with the *adivasis'* traditional institutions and worldview (Kohli 1994:89-107). As Sagar (2006:3177) points out, “the Indian state since independence in 1947 has been basically predatory in the experience of indigenous people. The state and its various agents have exploited them, violated their rights at whim and robbed them not just of resources but of their very human dignity”. Some observers have suggested that the postcolonial Indian state exercises neocolonial forms of control over *adivasi* areas, and that internal colonialism has replaced British colonialism.<sup>12</sup> It is argued that “even though colonization has ended, the situation has changed little... ruthless and exploitative political and economic forces continue to dictate and dominate the destinies of the tribal regions” (Sundar

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<sup>12</sup> Blauner (1969:396) used the term “internal colonialism” to refer to “the imposition of external power and the institutionalization of powerlessness” in African-American ghettos. In the southern region of Chhattisgarh Sundar (2001b:2018) noted that the state is “run in the interests of the rich and powerful” and “the administration... are largely from outside, originate from the upper caste, and look down upon the adivasis as backward and in need of civilization”. “Where adivasis have managed to gain some power and influence ... they are dependent on the financial backing of trading or capitalist interests, and have started exploiting the adivasis themselves”.

2007:189).

The state continues to own and administer the vast majority of forests in Chhattisgarh, with 43% reserved and another 40% protected (Government of Chhattisgarh 2005:269). Moreover, the extraction of forest resources by the bridgehead continues to enjoy the support of the state's legal, bureaucratic and military framework. But domestic state-capitalist interests have replaced those of the British as the main determinant of policy, and with improved means of transportation, better technology and a broader-reaching bureaucracy they have an enhanced ability to extract resources from the *adivasi* areas. Now, as in the late nineteenth century, *adivasi* discontent is concentrated on the issue of access to the forest and its resources, but we must seek a historically specific explanation for the latest outbreak of unrest. We therefore consider three arguments that have been put forward to explain the precise contours of recent upsurge in insurgent activity: the immigration of non-*adivasis* into *adivasi* areas, the industrial extraction of mineral resources that lie beneath the forests, and conflict over the prices paid for forest products. Thus we reformulate the fifth hypothesis:

*HYPOTHESIS 5.—Insurgent activity is most likely to occur in areas where there has been the greatest influx of non-adivasis, where mineral extraction is highest, and where the forests are most important to the livelihood of the population.*

The first argument suggests that unrest in Chhattisgarh's *adivasi* regions is the result of an influx of *pardesis* (outsiders). Immigrants are pushed by demographic pressures in other parts of India, and attracted by the prospects of making money in this "land of opportunities" (Bhatt and Bhargava 2005:33). Most of them either fill the bureaucracy or coexist with it in domination over the *adivasis* and low castes, as "merchants, moneylenders, mining project staff, forest officials, bus conductors, teachers, clerks, bankers, etc" (Sundar 2007:15). The fuzzy sets analysis, however, indicates that there is no relationship between an increase in the proportion of non-*adivasis* in *adivasi* areas and insurgent activity. This suggests it is not simply the quantitative

presence of outsiders in tribal areas, but the qualitative manner in which they interact with *adivasis*, that causes unrest.

Second, it has been suggested that the expansion and intensification of the insurgency is due to the increased expropriation of mineral resources in *adivasi* areas. There are sizable reserves of iron ore, coal, limestone and bauxite in the northern and southern regions. The increasing pressure on these resources is often related to the economic liberalization that began in the early 1990s, but actually the state plays a central role in facilitating the process of “predatory industrialisation” (Sundar 2007:289).<sup>13</sup> The Government of Chhattisgarh’s (2004, 8) *Industrial Policy 2004-2009* emphasizes that private businesses are to be offered incentives for establishing “mega projects in the most backward scheduled tribes predominant areas”. This is presented by the state as a means of developing “backward areas”, increasing revenue and creating employment. But it has led CPI (Maoist) General Secretary Ganapathy (2007) to argue that the intention of the current Indian state, in alliance with “corporate comprador big business houses [is] to drain the rich mineral and forest wealth” of Chhattisgarh’s *adivasi* areas.

As in the colonial era, the ability to exploit resources on an industrial scale depends on “how easily *adivasis* can be forced into parting with their land” (Sundar 2006:3189), and the state facilitates this by enabling businesses to purchase land using colonial legislation such as the Land Acquisition Act, which was enacted by the British in 1894 and allows the state to acquire land at a fixed price for “public purposes”.<sup>14</sup> This argument directly links *adivasis*’ support for the insurgency to “displacement caused by mega-mining projects” (Mohanty 2006:3163; also see Mehra 2008:19-20). It complements the neo-Marxist ideology espoused by the insurgency’s

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<sup>13</sup> Those who argue this point tend not to consider the recent economic reforms in their historical context. Mehra (2008:3), for example, refers to the liberalization of the Indian economy since 1991 as “the first wave of globalization in the country”. He fails to acknowledge previous interaction between India and the wider world including the British colonial encounter, as well the waves of migration into the subcontinent resulting in the conquest, displacement or subjugation of the indigenous population that date back at least to the *Ramayana*.

<sup>14</sup> The Panchayats (Extension to the Scheduled Areas) Act (1996) should, in theory, allow the local community to veto such projects, but in practice their endorsement is obtained through dubious means. Villagers are sometimes threatened by “gangs of goons” who coerce voters into agreeing to their demands, the minutes of *gram sabha* (meetings consisting of all adults in the village) may be rewritten, or fake *gram sabha* are used to approve a project (Sundar 2006:3189; 2007:289).

leaders at the macro level, and it closely reflects the master cleavage that is driving the conflict at the national level. It also fits in neatly with fashionable anti-big business, pro-environment, pro-indigenous rights discourses in India, as well as the broader debate regarding the world's indigenous peoples.

The fuzzy sets analysis, however, indicates that there is not a clear relationship between insurgent activity and increases in mining extraction. These results are not entirely surprising. Reservation at the end of the nineteenth century was the *adivasis'* apocalypse, and by comparison the loss of *adivasi* land to mining and industrial concerns in the past two decades has been insignificant. In 2005 and 2006 respectively, ESSAR and Tata Group, two of India's biggest steel companies, proposed to establish mines in the Bailadila area of Dantewara. It is interesting to consider these cases, as they are perhaps the most controversial recent industrial developments in the *adivasi* regions of Chhattisgarh. There was fierce localized resistance from the communities in proposed acquisition sites, and it is apparent that in acquiring the land ESSAR and Tata, in alliance with the state, rode roughshod over laws that were designed to protect *adivasis*. The projects have been subject to isolated violent attacks by insurgents, as well as widespread criticism from civil society at local, national and international levels. Nevertheless, while the southern region is over 39,000 square kilometers in area, has a population of 2.67 million, and consists of 3,749 villages (Census of India, 2001), the ESSAR and Tata projects affect just a few thousand hectares, several hundred people, and a handful of villages (Guha et al 2006:20; Sundar 2006:3189). More generally, there have only been a handful of recent cases where *adivasis* were displaced by industrial or mining activity in Chhattisgarh, and these cases have only affected a relatively small number of communities. Other projects that have provoked the ire of observers include the 5,734 hectare Bodhghat Hydroelectric Project, the Jagdalpur-Dalli Railway that requires 260 hectares, and a 267 kilometre pipeline built by ESSAR to carry slurry from the steel plant to the sea which cut a 20 meters wide course through reserved forest rather than the

sanctioned 8.4 (Guha et al 2006:20). They amount to localized disasters, and as such it does not make sense to argue that they are a general cause of *adivasi* unrest.

The third argument concerns the importance of the forests – and specifically non-timber forest products (NTFPs) – to the livelihood of the local population. NTFPs are sometimes referred to as “minor forest produce”, and until recently were seen as insignificant in comparison to other forests resources such as timber or minerals (Saxena 2003:5). They have, however, been vital for *adivasi* subsistence and trade since well before the arrival of the British. During the colonial period *tendu patta* (*Diospyros melonoxylon* leaves) – which are used to wrap *bidi* cigarettes – became increasingly important as a source of income for *adivasis* and revenue for the state. Since the 1960s a broader range of NTFPs have become commodities as industries found new uses for them. While the collection of NTFPs is labor-intensive and the returns are low, it provides a significant supplementary income for poor *adivasi* households.

When the insurgents first arrived in the southern region the prices paid to *adivasi* NTFP gatherers were well below market price as a result of exploitation by both the state and private traders. The state government nationalized the most commercially important NTFPs in the 1960s and 1970s. *Adivasis* could freely collect these products, but had to sell them to the state marketing board at prices decided by the latter. On paper nationalization had multiple objectives: to collect revenue, to protect the interests of *adivasi* sellers, and to satisfy the demands of industry and other end-users. In practice, however, as a former secretary of the Indian Planning Commission has acknowledged, it served a hierarchy of objectives: “Industry and other large end-users had the first charge on the product at low and subsidised rates; revenue was maximised subject to the first objective which implied that there was no consistent policy to encourage value addition at lower levels; tribal and the interest of the poor was relegated to the third level” (Saxena 2003:6). Thus the state acted as a monopsonist, keeping prices for unprocessed natural resources at lower than market rate, in the process exploiting *adivasi* labor, preventing the development of “spin-off”

industries and passing the benefits on to industrialists outside the *adivasi* areas (Sundar 2007:7). Unnationalized NTFPs – such as tamarind, and mahua (*Madhuca longfolia*) flowers and seeds – are also an important source of income for poor *adivasis*. They are sold directly to private traders – who are generally non-*adivasi* immigrants from other parts of India. Traders sell on the produce at large profits; Sundar (2001b:2017) found the mark up on tamarind was more than 300%. In the past decade the government monopsonies have been relaxed and the state has tried to introduce programs to protect *adivasi* gatherers, but these efforts have “have failed in the face of local corruption and trader cunning” (ibid).

The fuzzy sets analysis indicates that there is a relationship between insurgent activity and the importance of the forest to people’s livelihood. This is not surprising, as we have already established that insurgencies occur in areas that are predominately inhabited by *adivasis*, and that forest resources are of profound importance to *adivasi* communities. The price of NTFPs is one of the major issues around which insurgents have mobilized *adivasi* support. The insurgents organized strikes and raised awareness among the collectors, which resulted in the price of *tendu patta* increasing about 50 times over the 20 to 25 years that they have been active in the area (Balagopal 2008:11). “This has boosted the disposable income in the hands of tribals substantially and has been the single-most important benefit the *adivasis* have got from the presence and organization of the Naxalites” (ibid). This strongly indicates that support for insurgents among poor *adivasis*, whose livelihoods are dependent on NTFPs, is a consequence of the former’s ability to successfully defend the latter’s interests, which conflict with those of the purchasers of NTFPs.<sup>15</sup>

Thus, while the extraction of mineral resources from *adivasi* areas dominates the discourse about exploitation at the national level, it is apparent that the low prices paid by private

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<sup>15</sup> It should be noted that there appears to be have been an increasing amount of discontent from *adivasis* towards strikes that prohibit them from collecting and selling NTFPs (Balagopal 2006:2185; 2008:11). From 2003 onwards contractors have withdrawn their business from considerable areas in order to avoid the pressure of the Naxalites. This suggests that the insurgents have become victims of their own success; they have increased the price of NTFPs to such an extent that in some cases it is no longer economically rational for collectors to strike.

traders and the state for NTFPs is far more detrimental to poor *adivasis* at the local level. It negatively affects the livelihood of every poor *adivasi*, albeit in a chronic, undramatic fashion that does not attract the gaze of national level actors. This reminds us that rural insurgencies are processes that provide a medium for a variety of grievances to be realized within the space of a greater conflict, rather than binary conflicts neatly arrayed along a single issue. Poor *adivasis* who support the insurgency do not do so because they support Maoist ideology or the anti-globalization rhetoric espoused by leaders at the national level. They support the insurgents because they defend their interests at the local level. A recent report from the Government of India (2008b:60) concluded that the insurgency is viewed by its support base as “basically a fight for social justice, equality, protection and local development”. The state, on the other hand, has consistently failed to defend the interests of poor *adivasis*.<sup>16</sup> The Ministry of Home Affairs (in Sundar 2007:266) recognizes that the “Naxalites operate in a vacuum created by inadequacy of administrative and political institutions, espouse local demands and take advantage of the prevalent disaffection and injustice among the exploited segments of the population and seek to offer an alternative system of governance which promises emancipation of these segments”.

Our analysis clearly indicates that the insurgency is founded on resentment towards the impact of external political and economic interests on *adivasi* society. Nevertheless, unlike moral economists – or many indigenous rights activists – we do not see the penetration of non-*adivasis*, their bureaucracy and markets as a necessarily bad thing, nor on its own a cause of unrest among the *adivasi* population. In fact this interaction has the potential to benefit *adivasis*. The state has the ability to provide *adivasis* with education and healthcare to complement their indigenous knowledge, and social welfare to ease their hardship during lean periods; markets are capable of providing *adivasis* with the opportunity to receive a fair price for NTFPs or to supplement their

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<sup>16</sup> Recent government legislation aimed at improving the wellbeing of poor *adivasis* includes the National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (2005) which guarantees one hundred days employment per year to rural inhabitants, and the Scheduled Tribes and Other Traditional Forest Dwellers (Recognition of Forest Rights) Act (2006), which recognizes *adivasis*' rights to forest that they already cultivate. These are, however, “only small measures that do not address the basic structural issue of people’s rights to land and other productive resources” (Mohanty 2006:3163).

income with wage labor; and the law, the police and the military have the capacity to protect the interests of *adivasis* in accordance with the Indian constitution.

In Chhattisgarh's *adivasi* regions this is not happening. Schools and healthcare are ineffective because of absenteeism, village level administrators often abuse their positions so welfare policies do not benefit those who need it most; markets are distorted in the favor the purchasers; and the law, police and military are used to support a state that is hostile to *adivasis*. The terms of the interaction between the *adivasis* and the dominant state and capitalists are dictated by the latter – and benefit the state and capitalists at the expense of the former. *Thus, we do not understand the insurgency as a defensive reaction against the state bureaucracy and the markets, but as a defensive reaction against those sections of society who control what the state bureaucracy and the markets are doing in adivasi areas.*

*Adivasis'* involvement in the insurgency is not the manifestation of a desire to “turn back the clock” to a fictional time when they lived in isolation from wider Indian society. *Adivasis* want to be connected to the outside world, but they want this interaction to be on terms that will let them retain a secure land base, control over their natural resources, a modicum of political autonomy and a degree of continuity with the culture of their ancestors. For the vast majority of poor *adivasis* the insurgents appear to provide better prospects to achieve this than the state.

## CONCLUSIONS

The first objective we set out in the introduction was to further the substantive understanding of the latest wave of rural insurgency in India. Our analysis indicates that rural insurgency occurs in areas where social structure is predominately tribal. Outside political and military organizations – in particular the Communist Party of India (Maoist) – are important; but they act as a catalyst, influencing when and how the conflict emerges as an insurgency, rather than determining the

faultlines of the conflict itself. The hostilities are not simply between *adivasis* and non-*adivasi* outsiders. Rather, the insurgency is against a bridgehead that serves state-capitalist interests, and consists of both non-*adivasis* and a minority of *adivasi* collaborators who benefit from this association at the expense of the broader community. In Dantewara the interests of this bridgehead are represented by the government-sponsored *Salwa Judum*, and although there is a residual level of violent activity in all areas affected by the insurgency, the abnormally high levels of violence in Dantewara is due to their counter-insurgency operations.

The main issue of contention between this bridgehead and the insurgents is access to forests resources. This has been consistent throughout the *longue durée* of interaction between *adivasi* societies and the dominant state – whether colonial or postcolonial. A disproportionate share of the discourse regarding the basis of insurgent support concentrates upon the growing number of industrial mining projects that are being established in *adivasi* areas by large business houses with the support of the state. But such projects are relatively scarce and affect comparatively few communities. Our analysis indicates that the manner in which the state and private traders have conspired to keep NTFPs prices low, exploiting the labor of collectors, and passing these benefits on to end-users, has had a chronic, widespread and lasting impact on the livelihoods of poor *adivasis*, and is a major cause of unrest in *adivasi* areas. Over the past twenty years the insurgents' legitimacy among poor *adivasis* has been a consequence of their ability to significantly raise the prices of NTFPs. More generally, the basis of insurgent support among poor *adivasis* is related to their defense of the latter's interests, which conflict with those of political and economic interests of elites in the dominant society.

Moral economists understand rural insurgency as a reaction to encroaching capitalism or imperialism, while class analysts see revolutionary agrarian cultivators reacting from within the capitalist economy to overthrow landed upper classes previously dependent on colonial coercion for their survival. This distinction is not applicable to the *adivasi* regions of

Chhattisgarh. There is a large degree of continuity between the relationships of dominance imposed upon *adivasis* by the colonial and postcolonial state. Thus it is the continuation and intensification of already present colonial forms of surplus extraction, rather than encroaching imperialism, that the *adivasis* are reacting to. Moreover, due to the two dimensional nature of society, exploitation was and is carried out by a bridgehead of non-*adivasis* in cohorts with *adivasi* collaborators, which represents the interests of the state and capital. Support for this bridgehead was not withdrawn when the British left India; rather, it was continued and intensified by the independent state. Thus, the disruption of colonial power, which Paige (1975) believed provided the structural conditions for uprisings, did not occur in *adivasi* regions of Chhattisgarh.

Shin's (1994) argument that prior protest experience contributes to movements by developing class, political or collective consciousness is difficult to substantiate in the Chhattisgarhi context. Past protest experience is only important in areas where the circumstances that caused unrest in the first place still exist. The main reason there has been sustained unrest over the past centuries in *adivasi* areas of Chhattisgarh is that the socioeconomic and political context that encouraged rural unrest remained relatively constant. Present material circumstances are more important than prior protest experience as a cause of unrest because the former must continue to encourage insurgency in order to allow the latter to remain relevant. Where the present material conditions do not encourage unrest prior protest experience is inconsequential. Thus the sharecroppers and landless laborers that formed the social basis of the insurgency in Naxalbari after 1967 are no longer rebelling precisely because the socioeconomic and political context that encouraged unrest is no longer present.

Our second objective was to examine whether theories of rural insurgency developed in other contexts could be generalized to contemporary insurgency among indigenous people in Chhattisgarh. These theories provided fruitful hypotheses with which to begin our empirical analysis, but no theory on its own provided a framework to fully understand the pattern of rural

insurgency. Our analysis indicated that outside political and military organizations were crucial in transforming latent unrest into insurgency or counterinsurgency, but Popkin's political economy approach did not further our understanding of this process. The *adivasis* of Chhattisgarh were not "rational peasants"; the choices that individuals made were limited and strongly influenced by their positions in the structure of power and privilege. In concentrating upon the geographical limitations to insurgency Kalyvas ignores the role that the socioeconomic structure plays in defining the faultlines of the conflict. Nevertheless, we found that while Kalyvas' theoretical approach overstates the importance of geographical factors, such factors do limit where insurgent activity takes place.

Of the structural explanations the moral economy approach appears at first glance to be the most capable of explaining the pattern of insurgent activity in Chhattisgarh. The insurgency occurred in the regions where the *adivasi* population was highest and this can, in part, be related to its relative organizational autonomy and communal solidarity compared to caste-based communities. Nevertheless, our analysis indicated that class dynamics are also a crucial feature of *adivasi*-state relations, albeit not in the narrow manner that Paige envisages. The defining feature of *adivasi*-state relations has been, and remains, access to the forest, which is the *adivasis'* principal means of subsistence and production. *Adivasi* society is two-dimensionally hierarchical and consequently surplus extraction is not carried out by a "dense screen of social barriers and material relationships" situated within the community, but directly – with the help of the bridgehead – through the extraction of forest resources.

Thus, in isolation, neither the moral economist nor the class conflict approach provide an adequate theoretical framework with which to analyze insurgent activity in Chhattisgarh. The moral economy approach is problematic because, while it concentrates on the impact of outside forces on the village, it does not acknowledge divisions within village society. The class analysis approach concentrates on divisions within the village society, without acknowledging the role of

outside forces and actors. It appears that a synthesis of the moral economy and class conflict approaches, which considers the impact of outside forces as well as divisions within rural society, is required to explain the pattern of insurgency in Chhattisgarh. This raises the question of how to reconcile these two theoretical approaches, which *prima facie* appeared to be mutually exclusive? Our analysis indicates that the variables of village structure and class relations are both useful and complementary. It is the typology that distinguishes between middle peasants and proletarianized rural laborers that obscures our understanding and makes the two theories appear mutually exclusive.

In the context of Chhattisgarh it seems to be more productive to conceptualize these as ideal types rather than as discrete groupings that reflect social reality. *Adivasis* can, in part, be understood as middle peasants. They live in a socioeconomic system that is two dimensionally hierarchical and therefore there is no distinct upper class that coexists in their immediate vicinity. They own their land and therefore directly control the immediate processes of production. Consequently, *adivasis* enjoy a reasonable degree of organizational autonomy and communal solidarity, which results in organizational and material advantages for collective resistance against outside oppressors. But while *adivasis* own their own land, before the arrival of the insurgents in the areas they sold the produce collected on that land at very low prices, which effectively brought *adivasi* collectors under the control of the state-capitalist alliance as part-time wage laborers. Thus, *adivasis* are class conscious because they suffer, along with other poor *adivasis*, from the same grievances at the hands of the state-capitalist alliance and the bridgehead that represents its interests. Consequently, *adivasis* have the best of both worlds as far as insurrectionary capacity is concerned. They have the organizational autonomy and communal solidarity of the middle peasant, and the class-consciousness of the proletarianized rural laborer. *Thus, adivasis' revolutionary potential is a result of both their common origins in a village as moral economists have suggested, and an agrarian system that generates intense conflict over*

*surplus produced on their land as class analysts have argued.*

Our analysis indicates a set of conditions which, when all are present, have led to rural insurgency in Chhattisgarh. This provides a framework through which other rural insurgencies involving indigenous peoples can be analyzed. Rural insurgency occurs where indigenous people are embedded in a socioeconomic structure that encourages high levels of communal solidarity and organizational autonomy due to the lack of a distinct landowning class, but in which they are also class conscious as a result of being partially integrated into the dominant capitalist system as “semi-proletarians”. The insurgency is strongest in areas where Government forces cannot easily suppress it because the geographic and geopolitical features are favorable to the insurgents, but such areas must have a favorable socioeconomic structure. These areas are rich in natural resources, and the relationship between the indigenous society and the dominant state resembles that of colony and colonialist. A proportion of the indigenous population collaborates with the dominant state to form a bridgehead, and the interests of this bridgehead tend to conflict directly with those of the majority of indigenous people. Outside insurgent organizations play an important role in orchestrating preexisting socioeconomic antagonism into a sustainable movement. The legitimacy of the insurgent organization is a consequence of both nonviolent and violent activity; this is used to further the interests of a particular class (in this case semi-proletarian landowners) against those of the bridgehead, which represents external political and economic interests. Such an insurgency will result in a residual level of violence but violent activity will increase rapidly when the government tries to suppress it.

In addition we made four observations that challenge the dominant understanding of struggles involving indigenous peoples. First, while many studies point to the nefarious affects of globalization, the neoliberal economic system, and the role of big business, our analysis indicates that the state played a decisive role in facilitating the exploitation of *adivasis*’ natural resources. Second, although many studies stress the recent nature of these processes – in particular relating

them to the rise of globalization in the past three decades – we argue that they have deep roots in India’s colonial history. Third, many studies essentialize indigenous peoples as non-exploitative and undifferentiated societies that are victims of encroachment by the external political and economic interests. Our research, however, found that sections of the *adivasi* community collaborated with the outside interests that were exploiting the areas’ natural resources, and consequently that inter-community conflict is a crucial aspect of the insurgency. Lastly, many studies argue that the encroachment of political and economic interests into the indigenous areas unequivocally harms the local population, but our research suggests that the impact of external political organizations can be beneficial when they are designed to act in the *adivasis* best interests, rather than to facilitate the exploitation of the areas’ natural resources.

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