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Resistance, rootedness and mining protest in Phulbari

Thesis submitted for the degree of Dphil in Social Anthropology

Sadid Ahmed Nuremowla

University of Sussex

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Acknowledgement

<u>University of Sussex</u>

Sadid Ahmed Nuremowla   **Dphil in Social Anthropology**

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Summary

This thesis is concerned with the dynamics and social morphology of resistance to mining in Bangladesh. Using the case of on-going resistance to a government supported open-pit coal mine project proposed by Asia Energy Corporations in Phulbari, North-west Bangladesh, it considers the resistance within a particular context while investigating how the ideas held by various groups intersect and conflict in developing networks of resistance. Through ethnographic engagement in a particular 'community', as well as with the activism at the national level, the research attempts to explore how and to what extent the connection and disjuncture of observations and experiences of particular groups shape the resistance movement.

The aims of this thesis are two fold. Firstly it expands on anthropological accounts of social movements' rootedness in patterns of daily life. As such I examine how local resistance to mining initiatives emerges in specific contexts and around such located concerns that often remain unexpressed in the public discourse of protests. I show how resistance builds around anxieties of losing 'home' and accompanying rights and claims.

Secondly, this research contributes to the anthropological analysis of 'connection' and 'network' in this 'global' era. Through an ethnographic study of the resistance movement against mining I show how the movement's network is not a smooth integration of groups and actors; tension and ambiguity is central to it. I look at the ways in which friction of disparate ideas attached to different level of analysis, i.e. 'local', 'national' and 'universal', pave way for the formation of tentative alliances as the differential observations come to fit into the common discourses of protest.

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Chapter One

Introduction

On the 26th of August 2006, five people died and many others were injured when security forces[1] reportedly opened fire on some 50,000 people gathered in a small town in Phulbari[2], a sub-district of Dinajpur in north-western Bangladesh. The gathering was a protest in response to a proposal by Asia Energy, a UK-based mining company, to engage in open-pit coal mining. In 1998 The Asia Energy Corporation (Bangladesh) Pty, a wholly owned subsidiary of Global Coal Management Resources plc (GCM)[3], was awarded a contract by the Government of Bangladesh to mine coal in Phulbari. The Phulbari coal mine is an open-pit coal mining project which involves digging huge pits with heavy machinery to access the mineral ore. In Phulbari, this method would require removing people from their homes and farm lands. Estimates of the number of people that would be affected by the project vary from 40,000 to 470,000. Those opposing the mine claim that rivers and the water supply to Phulbari and the neighbouring areas would be threatened by the project. The threat of displacement to agriculturally dependent people and the perceived threat to their water supply were stressed by left-aligned activist groups in order to turn local communities against the mining project. Environmental organisations collaborated with the local people to communicate the potential environmental impacts of the Phulbari mine projects to a broader audience through public meetings and the use of the internet.

Dinajpur is a major rice-producing district of Bangladesh, a staple in a country where food sufficiency is dependent on seasonal production. Like other parts of the district, land in Phulbari is generally used for the production of high quality rice. Phulbari's landscape is largely comprised of flat fields with patches of flat forests, all of which would be destroyed to establish the proposed mine. According to the Bangladesh Census of 1991, the Phulbari sub-district has a population of 129,435 living within 150

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[1] Police and Bangladesh Rifles (BDR). BDR is a paramilitary force mainly involved in guarding the borders of the country.
[2] See annex for map
[3] GCM resources plc (GCM) operated under its former name Asia Energy plc. Asia Energy Corporation (Bangladesh) Pty now operates as a wholly owned subsidiary of London-based GCM resources plc.

villages. Agriculture plays a major role in the economy of this region, with 85% of the total population dependent on it for both subsistence and sustenance. The average density of people per square km is 711, which is less than the national average of 1,023 people per square km but still substantial. According to a recent environmental impact assessment report of the Phulbari project by Asia Energy[4], residents of Phulbari are largely dependent on agricultural labour. Following the protests, the Government suspended the field activities of Asia Energy to review the details of the mining deal. The Government did not, however, cancel the mining contract, and Asia Energy continues to lobby through different channels to resume mining while community mobilisation against the mining project persists. The Government drafted a national coal policy in August 2008 to accommodate the multiple concerns surrounding mining in Phulbari, but this is being scrutinized and criticised by national activist groups involved in promoting the protests. This protest was one of the largest against mining companies in Bangladesh in recent times, and set an example for the kind of response that foreign mining initiatives were facing. This thesis explores the discourses and practices surrounding the protests against the mine planned by the multi-national mining company.

The development of the mining sector in Bangladesh and the involvement of the International Mining Corporation began when a new government took power through parliamentary election in 1991 ending fifteen years of military-backed rule. The new government promised financial reform and economic growth and, in line with suggestions from international institutions, such as the Asian Development Bank, invited foreign companies to invest in the oil, gas and mining sectors. This was followed by increased attention from various groups concerned with the impact of mining on local populations and the environment, as well as on the national economy. During this period, members of a national committee called the 'National Committee to Protect Oil Gas Natural Resources Power and Ports (NC)'[5], who are mainly left-aligned political activists and intellectuals, increased their scrutiny of the government's deals with mining companies. Their goal was to increase awareness of the potential negative impacts of mining on national interests and the local population, and to help local

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[4] Bangladesh: Phulbari coal project (http://www.adb.org/Documents/Environment/BAN/39933-BAN-SEIA.PDF)

[5] More discussion on the organization of NC, the people involved with it and the background of its establishment are presented in Chapter Seven and in parts of Chapter Four.

communities organise themselves against mining. In the wake of foreign investment in the country's natural resource section during the 1990s the NC formed as a national forum to analyse and protest against various government deals with the foreign and multi-national corporations for natural resource exploration and extraction. The NC gradually strengthened its organisational activities and set up branch committees throughout many districts and sub-districts of Bangladesh. The committee established its organisational links with the mining site of Asia Energy through a committee branch in Phulbari town, a place that became the centre of organised local protests in 2005. During this time Asia Energy had completed their preliminary surveys for coal exploration and submitted its plan for mine development in Phulbari to the government. The plan was viewed by the NC as being against national and local interests on various grounds, such as the provision of coal for export and for the proposal of open-pit coal extraction methods that require the displacement of people living in and around the mining site. Activists of the NC's Phulbari branch mobilised people in surrounding villages against the planned mine, and the central leaders of the NC regularly visited local sites to organise mass protests, such as the one that took place in August, 2006.

International campaign groups working for environmental protection and human rights collaborated with national groups and organisations using the internet and web campaigns. The Phulbari coal mine project attracted considerable attention from national and international groups, in addition to organisations who protested against the negative impact that mining would have on the local people and the environment. The UK government backed the global mining company Asia Energy, while the UK-based World Development Movement[6] campaigned against Asia Energy and the Phulbari mining project.

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Events at Phulbari provided both the inspiration and empirical focus for this research. From the outset my primary interest was to study the dynamics and social morphology of resistance to mining in Bangladesh, based around the case of the on-going resistance to the proposed government-backed Asia Energy open pit coal mining in Phulbari. This research is not intended to romanticise this resistance as a protest against some global

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[6]World Development Movement is a UK based campaign focused on lobbying decision makers and campaigning about issues around poverty, climate change, trade, water etc. (http://www.wdm.org.uk/)

force, nor to illustrate a breakdown of this force. Rather, it provides an analysis of a case where the organisation and success of protests, against what may be considered an exploitative global mining initiative, draw on knowledge and ideas held by local, national and 'universalist' groups. It explores the stories that characterise the resistance in a particular context and considers how and to what extent the ideas held by different groups intersect and conflict in making networks of resistance.

As we shall see, the organisation of the resistance movement, in this case, is not limited to local understandings of the impact of open pit mining on the community. Various groups at different levels - from local to national, as well as groups with 'universalist' ideas such as those pertaining to the environment - are involved in the Phulbari resistance. Local communities seem aware of elements of global discourses such as 'environmentalism', whilst groups at the national level, i.e. intellectuals and environmental campaign groups, are collaborating in the process of forming the ideas for resistance. Some groups at the national level, inspired by 'nationalism' and 'anti-colonial' discourses, aim to protect the national interest and consider the government/Asia Energy deal as benefiting global capital and foreign companies only, whilst exploiting Bangladesh resources. Other groups, such as international campaign groups, are inspired by global discourses of environmentalism. These two groups may not have the same interests, but they collaborate with each other in aiding the communities against Asia Energy by participating in meetings and discussions at the local and national levels and writing for each other's publication and websites. The local, national and environmentalist organisations may conflict and may not share common interests, but seemingly, they come together to give a general meaning to the resistance movement. Local communities are facilitated by the national groups to raise their voices against open-pit mining. The process of facilitation involves the interaction of national and local understandings. The question of how the resistance is shaped by different ideas, and conflicts and collaborations between them, sits at the heart of this research.

At one level I will ask questions concerning which interest groups are involved in the Phulbari resistance and what meaning they attach to the cause and objective of resistance. This is to explore how and to what extent protests and social movements in a particular context are driven by disparate ideas and experiences. At another level I

will address how and to what extent these differences interact to find the spaces for collaboration. I will explore the contextual particularities of 'local' resistance and organisation of the movement at the 'national' level, and ask how, rather than being a movement merely against some global capitalist force, Phulbari resistance is shaped by complex and situated realities. I will investigate how and to what extent the disjuncture of observations and experiences attached to different levels of analysis, i.e. 'local', 'national' and 'universal', are negotiated in the spread of the Phulbari movement. That is, how and to what extent the connection and disjuncture of observations and experiences of particular groups shape the Phulbari movement.

In order to understand the dynamics of multiple socio-political sites engaged in the protest, this research takes an approach that considers the 'field' within and beyond the community. Participant observation in a Phulbari community, a protest group in the capital and an analysis of the historical context that informs the protest ideas are the key techniques for this research. This thesis suggests that contemporary political movements in Bangladesh cannot be understood without historical analysis of land and labour relations in the region.

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Privatisation of industries and initiatives to encourage private and foreign investment characterised the Bangladesh' policy of economic development and growth from the 1980s onwards. Export Processing Zone (EPZ) schemes were introduced during the '80s to attract foreign and private investors by offering them special situations in the EPZs, such as exemptions from taxes and tariffs and a reliable power supply. The idea of this special zone for private enterprises was not new in the region. India started implementing Special Economic Zones (SEZ) in the 1960s and by the end of 2007 it had 119 such special zones in operation across the country and they became a key strategy for the State polity of export-led Industrialisation. Bangladesh has eight such zones in operation at the moment and a few more are in the pipeline. Planned and established by the governments, these special zones are 'spaces of exception'[7]: transnational spaces that allow the 'flows' of global capital to select and 'touch down in

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[7] Cross, 2008; Agamben, 2005; also Ong, 2004; Palan, 2003

favourable enclaves'[8]. Like India and elsewhere in the "Third World", these special zones enabled global capital to take advantage of cheap labour in Bangladesh and, in turn, create job opportunities for the local population. Export oriented garment industries, largely located in EPZs, are the largest contributor to foreign currency accumulation and employ over 2 million unskilled labourers', 90 percent of whom are young girls and women[9]. Foreign and private capital investments are stressed by the development policy in Bangladesh on the grounds of employment, backward flow of technology and industrial infrastructure. However, the State's policy of patronising foreign and private capital in the region has been a contested one. For example, theorists of the political economy in the subcontinent - India in particular - argue that the state acts as a 'vast machine of patronage and subsidies' by transferring agricultural land to the ownership of corporations under terms which benefit the business elites, rich farmers and industrial capitalist.[10] Through initiatives like EPZs, Bangladesh governments have tried to provide a favourable condition for foreign and private industrial endeavours that David Harvey calls 'a central bias at the heart of the neoliberal State' by favouring the interest of business over 'the collective rights.....'[11]

'Foreign investors will quickly flock to invest…What matters to them is availability of land and quick decisions,'[12] said the executive director of the Bangladesh Export Processing Zones Authority to a national daily when asked about the government's approach to foreign investment. This reflects a synergy between the government's economic development policy and the interests of global and private capital. But the interests of the people in the region whose lands and life are being affected lie elsewhere. Often we see resistance to industrialisation because land matters to rural people and their livelihoods are being affected by the quick decisions on land acquisitions. For example, in 2005, the tribal people of the Niyamgiri mountain range in the Indian state of Orissa, along with environmental activists, forced the India-based Vedanta Resources PLC, which is listed on the British stock market, to suspend their

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[8] Ferguson, 2005. p. 279

[9] Bangladesh garment manufacturers and exporters association annual report, 2007

[10] Gupta (1989) described it as a 'national real estate scam in the making'. p. 788
Critiques have commented it as a strategy of 'accumulation by dispossession' which involves the political and occasionally violent transformation of other forms of ownership into private property rights. (Chandrasekhar, 2006; See also, Bardhan, 1998; Corbridge and Harriss, 2000; Jenkins, 1999; and Harvey, 2005.

[11] Harvey, 2005. p. 13

[12] The Financial Express, Dhaka. 24 April, 2008

activities for a state supported open-pit mining project to supply raw materials for an aluminium plant it had built in the area. In the wake of the protests a Supreme Court committee recommended the project be stopped as they found it to have an adverse affect on the environment and tribal people. The court later asked the company to come up with proposals for an environmental rehabilitation project and compensation to meet the demands of the tribal people. In 2007, in the state of West Bengal, which has a similar pattern of agricultural land use to Bangladesh, farmers and agricultural labourers forced India's biggest car manufacturing company, TATA, to cancel their ongoing construction of a car plant in Singur, near the state capital Kolkata. In this case, West Bengal's communist government backed the TATA car project that promised to manufacture the world's cheapest car from this plant, in association with Italy's car manufacturer FIAT. The farmers' protests, and TATA's subsequent pullout from Singur, demonstrated the power the protests movements such as this have and renewed criticisms of industrialisation's land acquisition processes in parts of India. Critical economists repeatedly noted that the land and other exemptions offered to foreign investors cost governments more than the benefit they deliver[13] and as Collins (2002b, 2003) commented, such corporate investments have few social and political ties and local accountability towards the community where they operate. This reflects how the processes of industrialisation and its impacts are perceived variously by different interest groups as the process gives priority to the interests of some groups over the 'competing aspirations' of others[14]. An important component of this research is to explore competing aspirations and perceptions around mining in Phulbari.

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Mining has a history of concurrence with the processes of industrialisation, militarism, imperialism, and dispossession[15]. For example, the Royal Commission Report of England (1842)[16] presents the scenario of the exploitation of women and children in English coal mines during the period of coal-fired industrialisation. Much of the social science work on mining and development, done since the late 1960s, presents mining as

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[13] Baissac, 2004. EPZ Impact. In the Financial Times FDI Magazine, October 24, 2004. See also, Oskarsson, 2006

[14] Grindle, 1993. pp. 41-67

[15] Bridge, 2004

[16] Available at The coal mining history resource centre website
http://www.cmhrc.co.uk/site/literature/royalcommissionreports/

a process of systematically benefiting the core rather than the periphery where it operates[17]. For example, Frank (1967) uses the example of the extraction of Chilean nitrates, which netted British capital £16 million between 1880 and 1913 while Chile retained only £2 million, arguing that European agriculture was developed at the expense of Chilean agricultural development. Many other examples of how mineral extractions did not help the economies of poverty-prone countries are prevalent. Centuries of mainlining activities in Latin America, and decades in Africa, did not change the economic scenario of these regions even though Africa produced 80% and 75% of the world's gold and diamonds[18]. In this view, mining by international companies reinforces the dependency of the Third World in order to fulfil the interests of global mining capital. Bridge (2004) has commented that the juxtaposition of mining within the harsh economic and social history of industrialisation and the persistent poverty of the mining communities constitutes a collective moral position, which underlies the resistance against the global mining corporations. Sizeable scholarly literature exists which suggests that natural resources negatively impact resource-rich countries' economic growth and data has been presented to demonstrate how natural resources increase the likelihood of negative outcomes in poverty reduction and economic performance[19].

In the views of the proponents of growth and development, on the other hand, mining has been considered as a catalyst for economic development in poorer countries. The World Bank is a leading advocate of natural resource extraction for uplifting the economic status of poverty prone countries. The Mining Department of the World Bank Group (WBG), for example, states, "Overall economic growth per se is a well-documented prerequisite to sustainable development and poverty reduction"[20]. For the Bank, private investment in the mining sector became the "dogmatic preference" to enable mineral extraction in poorer countries as a means of 'development'[21]. It provides the rationale for its support for extractive industries on various grounds ranging from job creation, large revenue generation for governments to technology transfer, which is all considered to directly or indirectly contribute to 'development'. A causal

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[17] Bridge, 2004
[18] Lanning and Mueller, 1973
[19] Collier and Hoeffler, 2005; see also, Bannon and Collier, 2003; Sala-i-Martin and Subramanian, 2003; Davis et al, 2003; Sarraf and Jiwanji, 2001; Isham et al, 2002; Eifert et al, 2003
[20] Weber-Fahr, 2002. p.13
[21] Bebbington et al, 2008. pp. 965–992

relationship between mining and poverty reduction is stressed in its analyses and are often backed by statistics. According to the World Bank about 13 million employment opportunities are generated worldwide by small-scale mining activities, while large-scale mining directly employs 2-3 million workers, which "has been shown to benefit all groups, including the poorest"[22]. Neoliberal economists, such as Bela Balassa (1980) and Anne Krueger (1980), put forward arguments in favour of natural resource extraction as a way for developing countries to make the transition from 'underdevelopment'. Balassa, for instance, argues that natural resources could facilitate a country's "industrial development by providing domestic markets and investible funds"[23]. Others stress reforms and strengthening of concerned state institutions for the management of mineral resources and the dealing of transnational investment in mining[24]. They suggest that reforms be directed towards better transparency over payments and revenues. They propose that in an improved system of governance mining can bring significant benefits for resource-rich countries by raising their national income through factors such as strengthening export market niches[25].

Rather than understanding mining ventures as inherently "good" or "bad" we need to ask how they are perceived by various groups of people in light of the "contentious…disagreement about the practices, meaning and significance of mining"[26]? In the last ten years a good amount of literature on mining has emerged, much of it concentrating on the impact of the operation of multinational mining corporations on indigenous peoples and mostly written by NGOs for policy recommendations or in partnership with oppositional movements[27]. Bridge[28] discusses the general focus of these studies, which is on: 1) the unequal power relations between mining firms and indigenous peoples; 2) the struggle over resource access; 3) land rights; 4) revenue distribution, and 5) and environmental impacts. In the majority of cases these struggles are defined in explicitly moral terms of justice, human rights and indigenous rights. Examples include a study of the impacts of a new mining code on

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[22] Weber-Fahr et al, 2001. p. 4
[23] Balassa, 1980. p. 2
[24] see, for example, Auty and Mikesell, 1998; Hilson, 2004; Hilson and Potter, 2005
[25] Hilson, 2004; Also, Auty and Mikesell, 1998
[26] Bridge, 2004. p. 242
[27] Gedicks, 1993; Cousins and Nieuwenhuysen, 1984; Howitt, Connell and Hirsch (eds), 1996; Howitt, 2001; Evans, Goodman and Lansbury (eds.), 2002; O'Faircheallaigh, 2001
[28] Bridge, 2004. p. 239

community groups and the environment in the Philippines in 1995[29] or a description of the effects of gold mining explorations on rivers, forests and indigenous people in the Guinean Shield during the 1990s[30].

More insightful studies investigate the processes of social transformation and differentiation. The work of Taussig, Godoy, and DeWind[31] provide critical insight into how people give new symbolic and material meanings to the relationship between mining and agriculture as mining becomes increasingly capitalised in peasant societies in Peru, Bolivia and Columbia. Taussig[32] for example, shows how people give their own meaning to capitalism's claim that it is productive, articulate their critiques of capitalism through their own idioms. He analyses the case of peasants in Colombia and in an analogous case of Bolivian tin miners-principally based on the work of June Nash[33]. Semi-proletarianised peasants in Colombia believe that proletarianised sugar-cane cutters can earn good money by making a contract with the devil, but this money will not cause them any good because it can be used only on silly consumer goods. Reinvesting such money would invite ruin and the cutter will die a premature and painful death. Taussig argues that this belief articulates people's recognition that capitalism is productive but it is based on magic and brings poverty, disease and death.

Evidence from Melanesia shows how aspects of social relations are redefined through the processes of mining and protests, and how land and other resources are deeply implicated in the construction and maintenance of notions of social identity. In this sense conflicts over mining projects are related to long-standing social disputes within communities[34]. Clearing and using the land and resources of an area shapes the identity and social relationships throughout Melanesia[35]. Filer[36], for example, using the case of Panguan in the later part of the 1980s, shows that the destruction of forests and waterways, and the making of huge holes in the middle of a community's territory, deeply impacted the local sense of self and community. In addition, the relationship between the changes in landscape and changes in lifestyles and identities is evident in

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[29] Tujan and Guzman, 2002
[30] Forest Peoples Programme, 2000
[31] Taussig, 1980; Godoy, 1990; DeWind, 1987
[32] Taussig, 1980
[33] Nash, 1979
[34] Yala, 2002; Goldman, 2003; also Weiner, 2002. p. 4
[35] Banks, 2005
[36] Filer, 1990

the testimony of the landowners. In case of Phulbari, the threat of the destruction of land and displacement of local people has been discussed in public protest events. Thus the question arises: To what extent does the threat of changes to land and displacements implicate social relations?

Recent work by Collier and Ross[37] has focused on establishing the link between civil wars ('separatist conflicts') and resource wealth. They discuss how mineral resources in mineral dependent countries act as a 'curse' with outcomes of slower economic growth[38], increased rates of poverty, substantial revenues that tend to make the State corrupt, a stronger military, even higher child mortality rates and lower investment in education, all of which contribute to the emergence of civil conflicts. Collier, in his work with Hoeffler, goes further and relates civil conflicts with 'greed, not grievance'; the battle for control of resource rents as the main casual element of a conflict[39]. Although the discussions of Collier and others gives us important insight into the way that mineral resources can negatively impact a country's ability to manage poverty and conflicts, their search for the cause of conflicts are primarily based on statistical analyses at the global level. Collier's[40] work, for example, is based on a statistical analysis of a wide range of factors from a sample of 47 countries that had undergone civil conflicts between 1965 and 1999. These provided a generalised model of resources and conflict but the need for a more elaborate kind of research is stressed by Weiner, "With but few exceptions...the absence of sophisticated understandings of indigenous motivations and cultural frameworks only seems to loom larger and more critical in the current period of extensive mining"[41]. Examples of more context-specific studies point out the weaknesses in Collier and Hoeffler's arguments. Banks[42], in his study of the OK Tedi dispute in Melanesia in the mid 1990s, shows that the causes of conflict are not just 'greed' or money; rather they involve a wish for more control over their lives. Filer[43] argues, in his study of Bougainville in Papua New Guinea, that no amount of money would satisfy the loss of, often unspecified, desire and the only demand in the landowners' grievances was the closure of the mine. This reflects the

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[37] Collier, 2000; Ross, 2003, 2004
[38] See also, Ross, 1999. p. 23; Auty, 2001. p. 112
[39] Collier and Hoeffler, 2000. p. 40
[40] Collier, 2000
[41] Weiner, 2001. p. 1
[42] Banks, 2002
[43] Filer, 1990, 1992

need for context specific investigations of what inspires different groups to participate in the protests.

Stuart Kirsch[44], in his book Reverse Anthropology, examines 'indigenous analyses' of environmental and social relations among Yanggom, an ethno-linguistic group in south-central New Guinea, to show how the Yanggom understanding and interpretation of their political struggle is shaped by these analyses. He provides an ethnographic account of how the Yonggom perception of human-environment relations, as envisaged through magic spells, form their struggle against the environmental impact of OK Tedi mine. He shows how the Yonggom exchange relations and how their discourses of sorcery are the focus of their claims of compensation. Through magical spells, the Yanggoms interact with other beings who they share the landscape with, recognising the interdependency between humans and other species; the Yanggoms recognise that other species have agency. Other species may appear in dreams to portend danger if their agencies are recognised by the person dreaming. A hunter needs to recognise this agency in order to communicate with animals in dreams or through magic spells to persuade animals to agree to the wishes of hunting. The hunter's ability to find animals in forests through magical spells depends on the hunter's recognition of the agency of the animals. This, as Kirsch suggests, exemplifies the connectedness of humans and other species providing an alternative approach to human-environment relations that acknowledges the interests of both human and other species. This mode of environmental analysis seeks to hold the mining company accountable, comparing the mining company and its impact on the environment to the 'sorcery' perception among the Yanggoom. In Yanggom exchange relations, failure to reciprocate or to fulfil exchange obligations, such as payments made by men to a bride during a marriage, can bring illness and death, which they call sorcery. They interpret the behaviour of the mining company in terms of its failure to fulfil the obligation to the people affected (failure to reciprocate). The waste materials released in local rivers by the mining company left the Yanggom in fear of harmful impacts, like the fear of the consequences of sorcery. They interpret the risk of illness, injury and accidents in terms of an analogy between the mine's impact on humans and the environment, and sorcery. This way of seeing the impact of the mine shapes the compensation claims, which, like sorcery accusations, draws attention to the consequences of mining on specific persons. They

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[44] Kirsch, 2006

find the mining company acting irresponsibly towards the community, harming individuals and making people leave in fear of river pollution, and relate this to wide range of accidents, such as overturned canoes or the broken leg of a person, that are seen as the consequences of the company's failure to fulfil its compensation obligation.

Kirsch suggests that the Yanggom people's analysis of the environmental impact of the mine offers "alternative perspectives that take social relations into account"[45]. This perspective can capture the claims and accusations that derive from the individual's vulnerability, which, as Kirsch observes, increases the recognition of the mining company's responsibility for the community. This, in turn, translates into political mobilisation through the formation of social solidarity of the people affected by the mine. In this sense political mobilisation is related to 'specific consequences for persons and social relations'[46].

Suzana Sawyer[47] provides ethnographic evidence based on anthropological field research in the Ecuadorian Amazon of how subalterns organise their oppositional movements through building unity across regional divides. A shared concern with neo-liberal economic policies of privatisation and multinational-investment implemented across the country in the resource sector helped formulate unity on a national level. Local people are not just the victims of all-powerful globalising forces; rather their movement strategies invoke the similar transnational processes 'that enable hyperexploitation under globalisation'[48]. Sawyer's observations underscore that the success of social movements are characterised by successful alliances with outside supporters (e.g. environmental groups) in protesting against state policies that affect local people. The 'indigenous'-environmentalist coalition that protested changes to the Ecudorian Hydrocarbon Law in favour of multinational oil operations who sought to lease more Amazonian land, is an example of such a network. These protests, as Sawyer notes, are against the policies that nurture transnational capital, undermining people's rights within the nation. Sawyer argues that the protests against multinational operations and its impact on the land and the rain forests invoke the desired condition

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[45] Kirsch, 2006. p. 129
[46] Kirsch, 2006. p. 222
[47] Sawyer, 2004
[48] Sawyer, 2004. p.15

of social justice and accountability that the nation will pursue. Thus, the struggle is more than just about the "material use of and extraction of rain forest resources".'[49]

The literature referred to above is based on locations far from the site where this study was conducted. I drew on studies from other regions as the existing research on mining in South Asia is largely conducted to inform development policy and focuses on the impacts of mining on the local people, in addition to the social and/or economic costs and benefits of mining[50]. Studies of the industrialisation process in general have been conducted either through surveys and interviews with workers that are removed from the social context, or through statistical analysis of data provided by employers to develop normative policy recommendations[51]. In one recent exception, Jamie Cross's[52] ethnographic research on global manufacturing sites in Vishakhapatnam in the Indian State of Andhra Pradesh, shows how the stories of labourers at global production sites, who stage periodic protests against these global companies, are to be understood in the context of broader social and economic processes that shape their interests and aspirations for upward mobility, which people pursue through a mix of consent and coercion. Cross argues that labour protests against global manufacturing should be comprehended in relation to the social and economic processes that configure their interests and their desire for a favourable condition under which they are able to accomplish these interests. Much of his effort is focused on exploring how the labourers consent and how resistance to the global production is constructed, and how the aspirations informing this consent and resistance are linked to wider social processes. He counters the portrayal of Indian manufacturing workers as simply being victims of global capitalism.

This resonates with Geert DeNeve's[53] observation of labour relations in the power-loom industry in the south Indian town of Kumarapalayam in Tamilnadu. His research showed that the agricultural labourer's entry into the urban textile industry did not turn him into a passive victim of his employer's desperate attempt to control and discipline the workforce. Workers make attempts to turn the *Baki*, the advance received by the

[49] Sawyer, 2005. p. 16
[50] To mention few of those: Ekka, 2006; Srivastava, 1990**;** Saha, Gangopadhyay and Bhattacharya, 2005; Kumar, 1997; Paithankar, 1994; Dhar and Saxena, 1994
[51] Swaminathan, 2001; Mazumdar 2001; Aggarwal, 2007
[52] Cross, 2008
[53] DeNeve, 1999, 2005

workers at the time of recruitment, into a negotiation tool for favourable working terms. While employers use *Baki* as a strategy to bind the labourers through debt, the individual labourer uses it to force the employer to take his concerns into account as the employer can not 'fire at their will' without getting the *baki* back. DeNeve's observations reveal how resistance to working conditions in the modern capitalist environment needs to be understood in relation to the non-static labour relations characterised by "a continuous process of formation and reproduction in which all participants attempt to impose whatever power is available to them".[54]

While searching for available research or writings on the mining protests in Bangladesh, I found just a few newspaper articles and websites and some environmental impact assessments conducted by environmental experts hired by the government or mining companies. No detailed ethnographic research was available on issues concerning mining and the protests that shed light on how and why the protests against the multinational mining initiative are shaped. This research is concerned with the ideas, nature and processes that shape the resistance to a coal mining project planned by a global mining corporation in the Phulbari sub-district of Dinajpur, Bangladesh.

2. Analytical approach

2.1. Social Movements and Social Movement Theory

How does this research fit, or fail to fit, into existing theories of social movement and resistance? In what follows, after presenting the principal premises of the earlier theories, I will discuss more insightful approaches to resistance that have emerged in anthropology. In the process, the discussion will lead to a set of questions.

Analyses of the nature of resistance and social movement are not new, but the emergence of new types of social movements and collective actions around the world has informed 'new form of understanding and debate on resistance and social movement that show momentous discontinuity from the past form of analysis'[55]. The appearance of new discussions of resistance movements has generally recognised the

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[54] DeNeve, 1999. p. 403
[55] Escobar and Alvarez, 1992. p. 2

limitations of functionalism and Marxism that were prevalent until 1960s and '70s[56]. These discussions, as Escobar & Alvarez[57] commented, recognised the importance of continuing the systematic attempt to renew our understanding of the elements and complex processes of contemporary resistance movements in diverse settings.

Jean Cohen[58] summarises the classical theoretical paradigms of social movements in terms of the assumptions that they have in common. First, a clear line can be drawn between two types of action - institutional-conventional and noninstitutional-collective behaviour - where the latter is not shaped by present social norms but is derived by undefined or unstructured situations. These situations refer to structural changes that result in the collapse of social control and normative integration. This breakdown causes dissatisfaction, frustrations, and aggression that guide individuals towards collective behaviour. Second, the development of noninstitutional-collective behaviour occurs through steps or a 'life cycle'. These steps include linear progression from 'spontaneous crowd action to formation of 'publics' and social movement'[59]. The idea here is social movements spread through contagion, rumour, circular reaction, diffusion etc. These means of communication give emergence and growth to a movement within this cycle. Thus, Cohen points out, these theories see social movements emerging from the point of 'grievances' and 'values' which guide the individual to participate in such events as a response to rapid social change. In this sense, collective behaviour becomes 'an abnormal or irrational response to atomized individuals to change,'[60] which is the view held by most theorists in this tradition. In all cases, social movements are characterised by psychological responses to the breakdown of familiar social systems, rudimentary modes of communication and volatile objectives. Such views make collective behaviour as a non-rational reaction to change. It is this understanding that became the subject of criticism by the later theorists.

The emergence of massive social movements in the 1960s and '70s challenged the assumptions of the classical tradition. The movements of this period showed different features from those described by the classical theoretical paradigm, with definite goals, clearly articulated general values and calculated strategies; not mere responses to

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[56] see Cohen, 1985; Tilly, 1985
[57] Escobar and Alvarez, 1992
[58] Cohen, 1985
[59] Cohen, 1985. p. 672
[60] Cohen, 1985. p. 673

economic crisis or breakdown[61]. In light of these movements, the insufficiencies of previous theoretical approaches became evident. In response to this theoretical crisis, the 'resource-mobilization' approach[62] and the 'identity-oriented' approach, or 'new social movements approach' as referred to by some,[63] emerged in United Sates and Western Europe respectively.

There are important differences between these two approaches. Eduardo Canel[64] discusses how identity-oriented or New Social Movement theory questions the Marxist view of social movements. It points out the inadequacy of Marxism, which considers only economic reasons as determining the unity of social groups and political and ideological processes, and understands social movements as essentially structured by conflicts between a conscious working class and their employers. Within this paradigm, all social formations, identity and actors, ultimately reflect class interests[65]. In contrast, the Identity-oriented/New Social Movement approach stresses the cultural aspects of new social movements and views them as conscious struggles to socially construct new identities, redefine existing social norms, and create democratic spaces for independent social action, putting social movements in the sphere of civil society as opposed to the state[66]. Actors in new social movements do not essentially represent economic classes nor do they represent the traditional ideologies of left, right or centre. Instead they are a combination of various categories in line with gender, sexual orientation, locality etc[67].

Resource-mobilisation theory considers social movements as more political than consciousness-raising, identity forming and ideological[68]. But some theorists in this school have been moving towards also understanding cultural aspects of movements (for example Aldon Morris, 1986). In this sense, the paradigm puts social movement simultaneously in the terrain of civil society and the state[69]. While identity-oriented or new social movement theory focuses on the 'newness' of the movements that emerged during the '60s and '70s, Resource Mobilisation Theory is more interested in the

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[61] Cohen, 1985
[62] Oberschall, 1973; Tilly, 1978
[63] Mouffe, 1979; Laclau and Mouffe, 1985
[64] Canel, 2004
[65] Mouffe, 1979. p. 169; Laclau and Mouffe, 1985. p. 76
[66] Canel, 2004
[67] Offe, 1985. p. 831
[68] Cohen, 1985
[69] Canel, 2004

similarities between earlier social movements and new social movements. As Tilly[70] states, both forms of social movement use the same limited range of legitimate actions available to collective actors; the same 'repertoires'. Emphasis on new rights and resources in the Nineteenth century shaped collective struggles at that time and they still characterise the collective action of the present time[71]. The prominence of democratic freedom followed by the consolidation of capitalism and growth of the nation state in the Nineteenth century triggered the formation of purpose-centred organisations and the strengthening of civil society that led to the growth of collective actions (e.g. rallies, strikes and demonstrations) that still characterise representative democracies[72].

New social movement approaches emphasise the 'cultural' realms (e.g. movement for identity, rights etc.) while Resource Mobilisation is more focused on the 'political' (e.g. struggle for control over resources), which, in turn, results in the formation of ideas of 'new' and 'old' social movements. Alvarez, Dagnino and Escobar[73] present arguments about this 'new'/'old' division which is based on the perceived cultural nature of contemporary/'new' social movements. They argue that all social movements are 'inevitably bound up with culture'[74]. If new social movements are formed around indigenous ethnic rights, ecological issues, women's rights, etc. and characterised by a focus on identity, 'new forms of doing politics' and 'new forms of sociability' then many movements, like urban movements of squatters and others, which are conventionally seen as struggling for needs and resources, also correspond to the notion of cultural force. 'In their continuous struggles against the dominant projects of nation building, development, and repression, popular actors mobilise collectively on the ground of very different sets of meanings and stakes'[75].

From this perspective, all social movements are enacted within a cultural context. Thus, social movements are seen as cultural struggles, which are struggles over meaning, as much as over socio-economic conditions[76]. Alvarez[77] emphasises the concept of

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[70] Tilly, 1978
[71] Tilly, 1978. pp. 143-151
[72] Tilly and Tilly, 1981. pp. 19–23, 44–46, 99–101; Tilly, 1978, pp.151–71
[73] Alvarez, Dagnino and Escobar, 1998
[74] Alvarez, Dagnino and Escobar, 1998. p. 6.
[75] Alvarez, Dagnino and Escobar , 1998. p. 6
[76] Escobar and Alvarez, 1992. p. 10
[77] Alvarez et al, 1998

cultural politics in understanding the dynamics of social movements. He argues that culture is fluid, and influenced by politics, as 'popular actors mobilise collectively on the grounds of very different sets of meanings and stakes. For all social movements, then, collective identities and strategies are inevitably bound up with culture'[78]. From this perspective, cultural politics means 'the process enacted when sets of actors shaped by, and embodying, different cultural meanings and practices come into conflict with each other .... [79]

The idea of cultural politics raises the questions: what meaning do different interest groups attach to the causes and objective of the resistance? And how do these meanings conflict or negotiate? If the social movements and resistances involve interaction between different sets of meanings then what is the intersection of these meanings at different levels? Clearly, groups within communities, NGOs and leftist activist groups involved in Phulbari protests may not have the same agendas, interest and understanding about the impact of mining and the protests. How do different types of identity inform the movement?

Alvarez (et al)[80] suggests that the analysis of social movements, from the point of view of cultural politics, should be guided by complex methodological directives. It is difficult to draw a boundary around a particular social movement. The effort of drawing a line between social movements and the state may be futile as such movements often involve a wide range of collective actions and organisations of different forms. Thus, 'when we examine the impact of movements.., we must gauge the extent to which their demands, discourses, and practices circulate in web-like, capillary fashion (e.g., are deployed, adopted, appropriated, co-opted, or reconstructed, as the case may be) in larger institutional and cultural arenas'[81]. In addition, Alvarez (et al)[82] notes that social movement activities usually are not restricted to the institutional spheres of politics. So, 'we must shift our gaze to also encompass other public spaces--constructed or appropriated by social movements--in which cultural politics are enacted and subaltern identities, demands, and needs are shaped'[83]. This reflects the need for a

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[78] Alvarez et al, 1998. p. 6
[79] Alvarez et al, 1998. p. 7
[80] Alvarez et al, 1998
[81] Alvarez et al, 1998. p. 16
[82] Alvarez et al, 1998
[83] Alvarez et al, 1998. p. 19

multi-sited methodological approach for the study of resistances in contemporary society. In line with the views presented above, this study takes a multi-sited approach to investigate how, and to what extent, ideas of the Phulbari resistance encompass multiple spaces.

How is resistance expressed? James Scott writes, 'For a social science attuned to the relatively open politics and liberal democracies and to loud, headline-grabbing protests, demonstrations and rebellions, the circumspect struggle waged daily by subordinate groups is, like infrared rays, beyond the visible end of the spectrum'[84]. Scott draws attention to the everyday forms of politics and resistance that are often missing from our thought because we are accustomed to big and open kinds of protests. In other words, 'politics becomes synonymous with the instrumental actions of severing individuals or states, and thus becomes narrowly delimited and far removed from the messy and contingent practices of everyday life'[85]. Ortner[86] discusses how conventionally, resistance was seen as a comparatively clear-cut and unambiguous idea explained through a simple binary: domination versus resistance. 'Domination was a relatively fixed and institutionalised form of power; resistance was essentially organised opposition to power institutionalized in this way'[87]. The term resistance is redefined in the work of Scott who explains the notion of less organised, more pervasive, and more everyday forms of resistance.

Scott's concept of 'infra-politics' offers an understanding of resistance as an everyday struggle. For Scott, infra-politics works for more organised political action as different infra-structural elements work to make operations of commerce possible. He provides examples demonstrating that transport, banking, currency, property and contract law, etc. are an important basis, or infra-structural element, for commerce. In a similar way, micro-struggles in everyday life are cultural and structural underpinnings of more visible political actions, where our attention has generally been focused. In this way, covert forms of resistance provide the 'building blocks' for a 'more elaborate political action that could not exist without it'[88]. As Amoore[89] discusses, Scott's study of

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[84] Scott, 1990. p. 183
[85] Amoore, 2005. p. 7
[86] Ortner, 1995
[87] Ortner, 1995. p. 173
[88] Scott, 1990. p. 184
[89] Amoore, 2005

peasant resistance reveals how arson, petty theft, poaching, sabotage and boycotts are the 'garden variety resistance' seen in everyday life. As Scott states, people adopt alternative forms of resistance that are accepted by the wider community where direct resistance is risky under the conditions of property law and state control. Scott's study shows how peasants challenge the landlord's right to police property through establishing alternative norms that avoid direct confrontation and are often 'getting by' or 'coping'. Scott argues that instances of open protests and headline-grabbing demonstrations are but 'ripples on the surface' of an inner or unorganised kind of resistance. In this sense, everyday experience and covert expressions of struggle are not detached from the more elaborate and organised protests, rather they may constitute the meanings, language and structure of overt expressions[90]. Indeed, in the case of Phulbari, our focus so far has been on the big and organised protests as explained through the example of the large public protest held in 2006 in Phulbari town. As Scott[91] argues, focusing only on these kinds of protests would make the other forms of resistance invisible. This research extends its enquiry into how the resistance is characterised in the spheres of everyday experiences within a particular context.

To what extent are the protests in Phulbari linked to the 'global' processes? Within recent anthropological work there have been some provocative explorations on how local people are connected to wider processes and how people (re)interpret these processes to devise their awareness and agenda. As Anna Tsing comments, 'to invoke the global at the turn of the second millennium is to call attention to the speed and density of interconnections among people and places'[92]. June Nash[93], based on her study on Bolivian tin miners, points out that the assumptions underlying most analyses underestimate the capacity for understanding and responding adaptively that exists among the people in 'less developed countries'. The opposition of 'traditional' to 'modern' or 'rational' refute the prospective at generating new interpretation and understandings. Nash[94] shows how Bolivian mine workforces are well linked to the international market and are conscious of their role as producers in the global exchange system but that at the same time retaining a strong identification with their own sources

[90] Amoore, 2005. p. 6
[91] Scott, 1990
[92] Tsing, 2000. p. 331
[93] Nash, 1979. p. 179
[94] Nash, 1979

of cultural (prehispanic) identity. As a result their consciousness as a group or 'community' is fundamentally coupled to an awareness of the world division of labour, in which they feel themselves to be exploited not only as a working class in opposition to the managerial and privileged, but also as nationals in a dependent economy subject to domination by developed nations.

On the other hand, local protests and resistance tend to travel across boundaries through various channels and through 'networks'. Kapelus[95] discusses how opposition to multinational mining companies is increasingly becoming transnational, while many NGOs in the 'developed' world who operate at the global level are collaborating with local interests. These NGOs are long established, have international perspectives and some are specifically focusing on mining issues. A connection has been established that has resulted in the formation of 'networks' of opposition to mining companies. With increased numbers of communities protesting against multinational mining companies in recent years[96], a global network of 'local organisations' has emerged to transport the ideas of protest from one place to another and share it with protesters in different locations[97]. These global organisations are bringing issues to the protests that did not originally derive from local concerns. Indigenous communities are now challenging the business procedures of the companies from profit-flows to headquarter decision-making to social responsibility (ibid). Experiences are being shared through different mechanisms, such as reports of the negotiations between communities and mining companies which are being distributed to other communities across regions[98].

Anna Tsing[99] draws attention to the possibilities of a 'link' in practical encounters. She presents evidence concerning the presence of a particular kind of 'universality' in the materiality of practical encounters. She explores the aspirations and specificity of universality and how they come to life in 'friction', which she calls 'ethnography of global connection'[100]. Tsing conceptualises this world connection as an 'unexpected alliance' to (re)make global possibilities. She reminds us that global knowledge is neither monolithic nor fixed. What is important, she argues, is to understand the nature

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[95] Kapelus, 2002
[96] Fabig and Boele, 1999; Burger, 1987
[97] Kapelus, 2002
[98] Board, 1997
[99] Tsing, 2005
[100] Tsing, 2005. p. 4

of certain kinds of 'collaboration' through which knowledge is created and maintained. This collaboration is neither a simple sharing of information nor of common goals. For example, environmental conservation uses the knowledge of conservation science to promote conservationist ideas to save engendered environment and species. But their effort is complemented by the rise of 'alternative' science and 'self-conscious misinformation' promoted through the channels of transnational political and informational networks. Here, conversations inspire conservationist, scientists, state regulators, the public, forest dwellers and other groups to collaborate. It is through the 'frictions of such collaborations, global conservation projects—like other forms of travelling knowledge--gain their shape'[101]. This view takes our attention beyond the traditional idea of opposing interest groups (e.g. rich/poor, south/north). This does not assume an impending compromise between them, but, as Tsing suggests, 'collaborations create new interests and identities' (idid). Tsing[102] notes that social mobilisations are redirected by disagreements between people about what their common concerns are. Even apparent solidarity does not necessarily mean agreement. 'This is the collaboration with difference: collaboration with friction at its heart'[103].

The discussion above indicates that a network or link between discourses and actors at various levels can be found when discussing the resistance and encounters of local people. The participation of environmental NGOs and 'nationalist' activists in the Phulbari protests and the international dissemination of local stories through global websites are all clues to a possible network between the groups and ideas at various levels. But we should not jump to the conclusion that this is a smooth and coherent integration of the movements. "Sophisticated social theorists….have been caught up in showing the programmatic advance of an integrated globalism of everywhere-flowing people and culture"[104]. The internal complexities of this process can be grasped by attending to the stories that "fall away" from the public record[105]. I intend to explore the aspects of, what Tsing calls, 'friction' through which alliances between the disparate forces of resistance may form[106].

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[101] Tsing, 2005. p. 13
[102] Tsing, 2005
[103] Tsing, 2005. p. 246
[104] Tsing, 2005. p. 11
[105] Tadiar, 2009
[106] Elaborated in Chapter Seven

2.2 On 'nationalism'

As we will see, idioms and sentiments of nationalism play a central role in shaping the protests against the mine. To establish a baseline for discussion on the subject, it may be helpful to start with an introductory discussion about 'nationalism'. As a starting point we can take the popular definition of Ernest Gellner who defines 'nation' as a group of people with shared culture, system of ideas, symbols, and communication means[107]. In addition to these attributes, according to Gellner, in order to have a nation status people should have the quality of mutually identifying each other as belonging to a common body or nation. He finds two aspects in the formation of nationalism, political and national, or cultural. Nationalism is primarily a political principal where political and cultural are 'congruent'[108]. In simple terms, nationalism in this sense is a mix of political principal or desire to live in a nation backed up by cultural sentiments. This "sentiment is the feeling of anger aroused by the violation of the principal, or the feeling of satisfaction aroused by its fulfillment. A nationalist movement is one actuated by sentiment of this kind"[109].

Following the general literature on nationalism we find two versions which Gellner does not go on to distinguish. John Plamenatz[110] proposes these two kinds of nationalism and clearly draws a line between them; one that formed in Western Europe, and another that grew later in Eastern Europe. Western European nationalism was based on cultural unity that gained strength with the dissemination of cultural identities through print capitalism, while Eastern European nationalism emerged as a political institution first followed by the formation of its common cultural character. Theorists like David Brown later branded these categories as civic and ethnic nationalism, respectively. Brown qualifies civic nationalism as a sense of community with a common destiny 'irrespective of their diverse ancestry'[111]. In other words, it is a feeling of solidarity and making of a community where people identify each other as members of the community. This kind of nationalism is considered based not on past cultural heritage, but rather is 'forward-looking' and congruent with the kind of nationalism we

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[107]Gellner, 1983. p. 1-7
[108]Gellner, 1983. p. 1
[109]Gellner, 1983. p 1; Gellner, 1978. p. 134
[110] Plamenatz, 1989
[111] Brown, 1999. p. 55

see in a number of nations today[112]. Authors such as James Kellas[113] believe the formation of some earlier nationalisms in Western Europe were civic and inclusive in nature; that is, citizenship not ethnicity was the element of national community. Ethnic nationalism on the other hand, Brown explains, is based on the belief of common ancestry and perceived common cultural heritage added by present day similarities in cultural elements of religion, language, and so on. Brown describes it as an ethnic sentiment and general belief of distinct ethnic bondage that need no 'proof'. Sometimes strengthening of common heritage is done by myth as 'social identity is characterised by a metaphoric or fictive kinship'[114]. This type is often characterised as the nationalism of the 1990s in Central and Eastern Europe[115].

The work of political theorist Benedict Anderson holds as a strong point of reference in the discussion of nationalism. Anderson's idea of nationalism, described in his book 'Imagined Communities'[116], matches with Gellner's idea in the sense that they both suggest that the emergence of nationalism is related to the development of capitalism in sixteenth century Western Europe. In growing capitalist societies states initiated measures to control the ever-increasing communication and information exchange, which was not possible with the existing linguistic 'idiosyncrasy'. So, the state imposed, for the functioning of bureaucracy, a common language for the nation[117]. The spread of national language identity was made possible, as Anderson (1991) suggests, with the growth of print capitalism. Books and printed materials played a central role in constructing nationalism by producing and distributing textual and linguistic homogeneity. Nationalism, for Anderson, is an 'imagined' community feeling: imagined because people identify themselves as members of a political community or nation and "will never know most of their fellow-members, meet them, or even hear of them, yet in the minds of each lives the image of their communion"[118]. For both Anderson and Gellner, nationalism is an ideological construction or 'imagined' not 'natural' determinate product of given religious, linguistic, racial, and other social conditions. Anderson proposes that nationalism is imagined into existence in this way

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[112] Gledhill, 2005
[113] Kellas, 1998
[114] Eriksen, 1997. p. 38
[115] Gledhill, 2005
[116] Anderson, 1991
[117] Gellner, 1996
[118] Anderson, 1991. p. 160

in Europe and everywhere else[119]. In this sense 'nationalism' takes a 'modular' form that works everywhere.

While not disputing the premises of an 'imagined community' and the role of 'print capitalism' as suggested by Anderson, Subaltern theorist Partha Chatterjee doubts the universal existence of a 'modular' formula of nationalism. He argues "if nationalisms in the rest of world have to choose their imagined community from certain 'modular' forms already made available to them by Europe and the Americas, what do they have left to imagine"[120]? He refers to anti-colonial nationalisms in Asia and Africa to show how they maintained a difference from the modular form of national society, using the particular example of Bengal in India. Chatterjee talks about the existence of two domains of social institutions in colonial India – material, or 'outside', and spiritual, or 'inner'. He suggests that anti-colonial nationalism in India started to form its own realm of 'sovereignty' well before the start of movements against colonial power by preserving its own inner elements such as language, family tradition, and other cultural identities. While replicating the elements of 'outside' domains, such as economy and statecraft, science and technology, they preserved their 'inner' social conditions by keeping them away from the colonial reform process. If nationalism is imagined, then, Chatterjee argues, it is this 'inner' aspect where imagined community is brought into being where nation is already sovereign even within colonial rule[121].

To sum up Chatterjee's point, there are two processes that accompanied the formation of nationalism in India. The first, are the processes initiated by the state to develop national institutions (need of this is not generally disputed) by reforming social traditions, customs, and language etc. Secondly, while not disputing the need for change, there were no simple transformations of simply echoing European patterns. To illustrate these processes Chatterjee provides the following example using 19th century Bengal. In the first half of the nineteenth century books and other print materials completely displaced Persian for English as the language of bureaucracy and means of intellectualism in Bengal, and it was not until the later half of the century that intellectuals, literary societies, and publishing groups made it their cultural project to equip Bengali as a standardised language. They considered the Bengali language as

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[119] Anderson, 1983
[120] Chatterjee, 1993. p. 5
[121] Chatterjee, 1993

their 'inner domain of cultural identity' that needed to be kept away from colonial reform[122]. This view represents a flexible and 'non-modular' form of nationalism that is subject to revision by the line of its internal 'cleavages'. This view is of immense significance for my research in the analysis of the form of nationalism as it is applied in the context of the Phulbari movement.

2.3 On Social Capital

We will see in Chapter Six (Part One) how in Phulbari anxieties derived from the possible breakdown of the 'community' and the loss of certain qualities entailed in social relationships, such as the relations of 'trust' and 'reciprocity', by mining displacement plays a significant role in the formation of local resistance to the mine. The discussions of social capital are concerned with these qualities of social relationships. Despite differences in the way the term social capital has been used it generally refers to resources that inhere in social relationships. As Harris writes: "they are resources otherwise labeled as 'trust' and 'reciprocity, that both underlie and derive from some social networks"[123]. The impact and function of social capital at the personal, community and state level has been explained by a number of scholars.

James S. Coleman[124], for example, conceptualises social capital by differentiating it from other forms of capital. He defines it as 'a resource for action' that resides in the structure of social relations, and argues that it differs from other forms of capital that lay within the control of a person or a corporate entity. Unlike other forms of capital, he argues that social capital inheres in the structure of relations between and among persons. He also sees similarities with other forms of capital; "like other forms of capital, social capital is productive, making possible the achievement of certain ends that in its absence would not be possible." He found three main forms of social capital; high levels of obligations and expectations, information potentials, and norms and effective sanctions[125]. The first form implies that people 'do things' for each other with the expectation and trust that their helpful action will be repaid; that the 'cost' of their action will bring benefit in due course. The second form relates to the potential of the acquisition of information from others that enable one to act in a

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122 Chatterjee, 1993. p. 7
123 Harris, 2001. p. 27
124 Coleman, 1988. pp. S95- S120
125 Coleman, 1990. p. 302

knowledgeable/rational manner. Finally, social behaviour is regulated through the means of social control that is constituted, Coleman argues, by social ties through the generation and sustenance of norms of approved behaviour and sanctioning of disapproved behaviour. In this third from, social capital acts in the interest of collective 'public' good and guides people to concur with collective concern, not just self-interest. Coleman's concept of social capital, thus, combines economic rationality and social organisation focusing on both action and structure. A central feature in his concept of social capital is family relations, which produce human capital by nurturing a child or young person for cognitive and social development[126].

While Coleman is primarily concerned with the individual level, Putnam relates the concept to the community or national level. He offers a definition of social capital as "features of social organisation, such as networks, norms, and trust that facilitate coordination and cooperation for mutual benefit"[127]. He sees social capital as "networks of civil engagement" or networks of community groups linked by solidarity, integrity and participation. These civic networks, Putnam argues, promote social capital in the form of norms of reciprocity and trust held within groups, communities and societies, and can therefore be used for collective action. According to him, community and group participation, and self-sustaining voluntary associations create and sustain the 'bridging' social capital that demands for conformity and enables people to 'go ahead'.

More insightful analysis of social capital is provided by Pierre Bourdieu who argues that it needs to be understood in relation to three forms of capital, economic, cultural and social, because these three forms are interdependent; the development of social capital requires the investment of some material or physical resources and the acquisition of some cultural knowledge, which enable people to build relations with 'valued others'[128]. By economic capital Bourdieu refers to as one's control over economic resources such as cash, assets etc. Cultural capital, in contrast, denotes something that an individual can accumulate over time through skills, education, training, and advantages that a person possesses which gives him a higher status in society. Bourdieu, in his attempt to understand differential education outcomes in France, explains that the attitudes and knowledge transmitted to children by their

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[126] Edwards et al, 2003
[127] Putnam, 1993. p. 36
[128] Portes and Landolt, 2000

parents to succeed in France's current education system is a form of cultural capital. Social capital is neither reducible to, nor independent of, economic or cultural capital. It is created and maintained by the transformation of economic and cultural capital in a constant effort of social interaction[129]. Bourdieu does not see social capital as a 'by-product' of other purposes in social relations, rather argues that people deliberately build relationships so that they may benefit from them later on.

Capital in Bourdieu's definition is anything that is productive and can be accumulated[130] and social capital is the "aggregate of the actual and potential resources which are linked to possession of a durable network of more or less institutionalized relationships of mutual acquaintance and recognition"[131]. These networks can build up as reciprocal relationships that can be productive for the individual. Bourdieu's definition establishes two elements of social capital; first, social relationship that allow people to claim access to resources possessed by their associates, and, second, the amount and quality of those resources[132]. According to Bourdieu, people accumulate social capital through membership in networks and social institutions and then transform it into other forms of capital to achieve a better position in society. Obligations and mutual recognition of group membership is produced by material and symbolic exchanges within these relationships. The amount of social capital people possess depends on the extent of their network, on the extent and quality of the capital possessed by those networks, on expectations of reciprocity being met, and on their status within the society.

'Connections', according to Bourdieu, play a part in the reproduction of classes. He points out that membership, for example, of a prestigious club can act as an investment to build a form of social capital that might be converted into economic capital. In other words, the possession of particular durable social relationships may facilitate unequal access to resources. In this view, social capital is an aspect of differentiation of class, and of power[133]. Economic, cultural or social capital, Bourdieu argues, takes the form of symbolic capital "when it is grasped through categories of perception that recognise its specific logic or…misrecognise the arbitrariness of its possession and

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[129] Baron et al, 2000
[130] Bourdieu, 1986. p. 249
[131] Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992. p. 119
[132] Protes, 1998. p. 2
[133] Harriss, 2001. p. 4

accumulation[134]. According to him, social networks, education and cultural knowledge are forms of symbolic capital that are all subject to the same laws of accumulation, inheritance and exchange that are applied to material forms of capital. Bourdieu's theory of cultural capital puts forward a model of symbolic competition, personal aspiration, and choice.

Geoffrey Wood's[135] reflection on social relations in Bangladesh diverges from Bourdieu's concept of social capital as a weapon "in winning and keeping the confidence of high society"[136] and suggests that it is not only the domain of the elite. Wood suggests that poor people in Bangladesh invoke a 'perverse' social capital to access financial and other resources. A particular type of social capital is formed through connections with powerful people in unfavourable terms. In countering Putnam's and other's suggestion that social capital works better in the well-governed and rich communities than the underdeveloped one, Wood shows that, in Bangladesh, it works more for poor than the rich[137].

Wood suggests that Bangladesh, like many of the world's poorest countries, lacks two important pre-conditions for providing welfare to its citizens, efficient government and/or a pervasive formal labour market[138]. He argues that the absence of welfare provisions has led to the creation of an 'informal security regime' where poor people have to rely heavily upon community and family relationships of various kinds, as they cannot fulfil their needs from state or market. The provision of this informal security, however, comes at the cost of reliance on clientelism and patronage, as rural society and relations in Bangladesh are characterised by inequality and hierarchy. People seek social capital within multi-dimensional social ties. Hierarchical relations between patrons and their clients, and more reciprocal relations within keen groups, represent a density of interactions that "bind social actors into complex overlapping obligations reinforcing the predictability of mutual expectations"[139]. Wood observes that an informal system of rights and claims operates as these interactions imply norms,

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[134] Bourdieu, 1986. p. 119
[135] Wood, 2005
[136] Bourdieu, 1986. p. 118
[137] See, Wood, 2003, 2004, 2005
[138] Wood, 2004. p. 49
[139] Wood, 2005. p. 16

customs, habits and expectations of conduct between kin, neighbours, and community acquaintances[140].

Cultural and religious codes, as well as symbolic capital, Wood argues, reinforce networks of mutual solidarity, subjective empathy, and affective value. Social capital is not simply reducible to mutual insurance and protection. According to Wood, the sense of public betterment in Islamic ideology in Bangladesh influences the way one's duty to people in need of help is viewed. Lending money to poor kin or providing them with a job is often labelled as a duty. In the context of Bangladesh, ignoring the difficulties of others is considered shameful and may cause one to be labelled 'uncaring'. An uncaring reputation is detrimental for one's own 'social insurance' and may prevent future support and assistance. Extreme, non-conforming behaviour in one dimension (i.e. wages or interest rates charged by money lenders) may undermine the security value of other dimensions. The crosscutting ties act as a moderator to maintain social and cultural limits to these non-conforming behaviours. Within these 'pools of relationship options' poor people manage the support of patrons, neighbours and kin. The social insurance built over time and through multi-dimensional relationships, whether hierarchical or reciprocal, is an important feature of social relations in rural Bangladesh[141]. Wood's view of social capital provides an important perspective to explore how the spheres of social relationships influence the formation of local resistance to the threat of displacement due to the mine planned in Phulbari.

Conclusion

This introductory chapter has focused on the theoretical discussions and debates around the nature and processes of resistance. This chapter started with the events and background of the protests against the mining corporation, which have inspired this research. The relatively unexamined context of protests against the mining in Phulbari, in the northern districts of Dinajpur in Bangladesh, sets the site of this research. Some theories of resistance, and the nature of the ideas and knowledge that shape it, discussed later in this chapter, present a more insightful analysis of the resistance movement. Much of these discussions are focused on the intersection of ideas and knowledge as they apply to the notion of resistance and the expressions of protests, and

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[140] Wood, 2005. p. 5
[141] Wood, 2005. p. 16

one of the dynamics of the resistance movement in the context of an increasingly 'connected' world.

All of these ideas inform the succeeding chapters. My thesis will focus on examining how, and to what extent, the Phulbari movement is shaped by groups with different levels of analysis, i.e. local, national and 'universal', and by the disjuncture and connection between them.   By doing this I will show that, rather than being 'homogenous' protests against the global mining corporation, the Phulbari movement is embedded in divergent ideas and socio-political particularities. I will argue that the conflict of divergent ideas is characteristic to the collaboration of resistance.

Chapter Two

Research strategy, sites and the politics of fieldwork

Outline

This chapter describes my methodological approach and the politics of 'fieldwork'. After presenting a brief chronological description of my travels to and through field sites, I discuss how my methodology and choice of sites fit into the premises of a 'multi-sited' approach. I draw on the possibilities and challenges as experienced by some of its advocates and followers to make the point that my ethnographic endeavour in more than one location is driven, like most ethnography, by anthropology's familiar focus on sets of situated practices and relations between them.

Reflecting on my ethnographic engagement in the village of Borogram, where most of my research was conducted, I address some key points of the post-modern analysis of the 'crisis of ethnographic representation'[142]. I share my field experiences of interaction with my informants to suggest how post-modern agendas are also inadequate for addressing politics around textual representation and how the process of representation is contingent and contestable. Situating myself within the context of Borogram village I reveal the inherent problems of essentialising the researcher's positionalility (i.e. 'native'/ 'non-native'). This is followed by a discussion of my research strategies and the ethical issues I encountered.

1. Finding my 'field sites'

The basis for this research is part of a wider project funded by the ESRC/DFID[143] on Mining, Livelihoods, Resistance and Social Networks in Bangladesh, and was primarily conducted in Borogram village of 'Phulbari' in Dinajpur. A part of my field research was also conducted in Bangladesh's capital, Dhaka, to follow the organising forces of the protest, which became the site for regular anti-mining demonstrations and protest activities.

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[142] Clifford and Marcus, 1986
[143] The Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC), UK and The Department for International Development (DFID), UK

In Borogram I conducted participant observation to explore the ethnographic specificities and realities that shaped the resistance to the proposed mine at the local level. In the capital I engaged, as a participant, in the day-to-day activities of a national forum called the National Committee to Protect Oil-Gas-Mineral Resources-Power and Ports (NC)[144] organising and facilitating the protest at the national scale. Through the process of participation in NC's activities I gathered the perspectives of the organisers and officials of a non-government environmental organisation that was collaborating with the protest.

In conducting my research amongst different levels, the challenge was to grasp the ideas and observations held by these different groups. Despite their differences, various groups with their diverse understandings and commitments ultimately connected at the discursive realm of the protests. The research in Phulbari will reveal, on the one hand, how resistance is shaped by distinct realities and disparate experiences and, on the other, how it all works together and is translated into a seemingly unified network of resistance.

My social background influenced the way I obtained access to the field. I obtained my graduate degree in Anthropology from the Jahangirnagar University, Bangladesh located in the outskirts of the capital Dhaka. One of the central leaders and organisers of the movement was a teacher of mine from the Anthropology Department at the University. Some of the young activists of the movement were involved in Dhaka-based literary and cultural organisations, some of which I was associated with. My previous associations with some of the leaders and activists of the movement proved helpful in making contacts and finding and accessing the field.

Early communications with groups and parties involved in the movement were conducted through email and telephone conversations before leaving for the field. My connection with the activists assisted with indentifying the appropriate contact persons to discuss the possibility of a longer-term involvement with the movement processes. Some academic cum political figures of Bangladesh had become involved in the movement and had taken on central organising leadership roles. I invoked my University associations with one of these academics to make early contact with the

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[144] Elaborate discussion on the background and organization of NC is presented in Chapter Seven and Chapter Five provides descriptions of Borogram village and its aspects of social relations.

groups involved in the movement. Having contacted these groups at different levels, from the villages in Phulbari to groups in the capital, I was exposed to numerous potential ethnographic 'sites', all of which looked worthy of following and all of which seemed "capable, recursively, of shaping the unfolding study"[145].

This initial dilemma was dealt with through the process of my actual engagement and 'interplay' within the field that directed and shaped my field sites as I went through the process. Provoked by an apparent feature of the Phulbari movement that demonstrates the organisational link between the villages in Phulbari, activists in Phulbari town and actors in the capital, I needed my research to be multi-sited in order to explore how the movement is shaped at and within these three different levels. During my early engagement in the daily activities of the NC, and through a few short-term visits to towns and villages around Phulbari where the mining project is planned, I began to identify the actors within the movement. In order to examine the stories and realities that were often absent in the formal agendas of the NC, I found it necessary to establish a dwelling in one of the villages suffering from the threat of displacement. Simultaneously, I found it important to examine how the movement was achieving success, at least in forcing a delay to the mining project, through the initiatives of apparent collaboration between political parties, individuals, environmental organisations and the villages. Participation in NC activities provided opportunities to explore the dynamics and limits of this kind of collaboration, as it became the organisational platform of collaboration for the movement, as is discussed in Chapter Seven. This does not mean that I simply submitted myself "to a track laid out"[146] for me; rather, that my field was envisaged through my engagement and 'interplay' with it[147].

The first two months of my fieldwork were spent in the Bangladeshi capital, Dhaka, where I participated in the day-to-day organisational activities of the NC. During this time I became familiar with the organisational structure of the committee and the groups and actors involved with the movement. I observed their working processes and the ways that they organised themselves and connected with local actors in Phulbari. Three days after I arrived in Bangladesh I called the member secretary of the NC, who I

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[145] Fairhead, 2011. p. 144
[146] Coleman and Hellermann, 2011. p. 10
[147] Farihead, 2011. p. 145

had known prior to this research, and requested his help. I expressed my interest in being a part of NC activities in order to understand the protest processes. He immediately asked that I attend a press conference the very next day to start my work with NC.

The conference was organised to force the NC's agenda on the proposed Phulbari mine to the government. The building where the press conference was held was actually one of the main offices of the Bangladesh Communist Party, placed in the commercial centre of the capital. As I approached the building aptly named 'Mukti Bhaban' or 'Freedom House', I noticed the red flag of the communist party hanging from the top corners. At that time I was not yet aware of the working relationship of the communist party and the NC, and thus was not sure if Mukti Bhaban was also an office of the NC. As I had been instructed to do, I entered the meeting room where the conference was scheduled to take place, introduced myself and nervously explained my purpose to some of the present activists. Having been previously notified of my arrival by the member secretary, the activists provided me with a warm welcome. After the press conference the member secretary introduced me to some other leaders of the committee, all of whom represented various left political parties, including the Communist Party. Through our discussions I found that this meeting room was being regularly used as a space for events, such as press conferences and internal discussions, for planning particular protest activities and coordinating meetings of the NC. This building became a regular destination for me during the first two months of my fieldwork as I participated in these organising events.

After two months in Dhaka I made a fifteen-day visit to Phulbari, the actual mining site. Just before entering Phulbari I observed a large banner that had been posted on a wall reading, 'No to foreign company, No to export, No to open pit mining', reminding me that people there are sensitive about the word 'foreign'. The next morning a few local leaders and activists of the NC welcomed me in their Phulbari office. The central leaders of the NC had informed them of the purpose of my visit and had requested that they cooperate with me. I was introduced as a PhD researcher from a UK University working to understand the reasons and processes of the Phulbari protests. A few local leaders politely questioned the purpose and use of my research. I was always uncomfortable answering this question and never sure if my answer was satisfactory.

My discomfort stemmed from the fact that I was not sure of the possible known and unknown uses of my research once documented and disseminated. However, I always explained my research purpose as clearly as I could.

Being a native Bengali speaker my language skills were useful in explaining my purpose and in clarifying some aspects of my research. While explaining my research purpose as part of my 'rapport building' initiatives to people I met in Phulbari city, I was asked, 'how would your work help stop mining in our area?' For few seconds I simply did not have an answer to this question. I had already begun to feel an emotional attachment to the people protesting against the proposed mining and I wanted them to see me as a supporter of their protest. This added to some of the ethical issues that arose during my fieldwork, which will be discussed later in this chapter. I replied that my work might not help stop Phulbari mining directly. I did not know if my answer satisfied him, but rather than trying to satisfy everyone I wanted to keep my answers honest. Throughout my entire visit I explained the actual purpose of my research in order to avoid any undue expectations. My foreign university background, in reality, did not create any problems for gaining cooperation from local activists. They promised their cooperation during my stay in Phulbari and they provided me with all possible help in establishing myself in the village, including helping me to find a house.

My methodological position did not subscribe to the assumption that a subject can only be found in "natural units of difference such as cultures and communities" as some would argue inherited from 'Malinowskian ethnography'[148]. Trouillot discusses the broader point that some landmark works in the histories of fieldwork have given rise to the habit of naïve treatment of space[149]. He argues, "the problem is not fieldwork per se, but the taking for granted of localities upon which the fetishization of a certain kind of fieldwork was built and the relation between such supposedly isolated localities and supposedly distant cultures"[150]. I, however, was committed to understand the socio-political dynamics of Phulbari movement within the context of the everyday realities of societies in actual mining sites. This led me to the ethnographer's familiar strategy of

[148] Marcus, 2005. p. 7
[149] Trouillot, 2003. p. 13
Though there exists note of caution about depicting a too static picture of Malinowski's work [Andrea Cornwall (2011), for example, provides such note.] Ferguson, in his new piece, also stresses that we are ultimately following the essence of studying relations in Malinowski's work in contemporary methodological innovations (Ferguson, 2011).
[150] Trouillot, 2000. p. 125

establishing a longer term dwelling in one of the villages within the planned mining areas where village groups were regularly participating in anti-mining events organised by Phulbari town activists.

Having a guide was a necessity, as I had been informed by the activists in Phulbari town that it would not be possible for an 'outsider' to access the villages without a guide known to the villagers because they might suspect an unknown outsider as an agent of Asia Energy trying to convince the villagers in favour of mining. My guide was an activist from Phulbari town who had contacts in the village as a result of his interaction with the village groups in discussions around the issues of mining. He assisted me in gaining access to the village and helped to alleviate early suspicions held by the villagers I met during my early visits. Sometimes explaining my research objectives served little purpose in obtaining their consent for the research, as the question of which side of the movement, anti-mining/pro-mining, I belonged to became the key consideration for the villagers. One of the elderly villagers said, "You are like my son. Assure us that you are not actually working for Asia Energy under cover. We have seen a lot. Many outsiders like you come to us; speak nicely with us with a hidden mission of spying for Asia Energy". My guide assured them that I was not serving for the company and I tried to clarify my reasons for wanting to live in the village and what I would be doing during my stay. I spent a couple of days with different groups in various pockets of the village discussing issues around mining and protests. I was, of course, not trying to convince people in favour of mining and as we talked more over the next few days, I was given clearance to come to the village anytime.

Once I established myself as a researcher looking into issues around the anti-mining protests I began to approach groups of activists in the town and people in the pockets of the village to explain my purpose. It was through these interactions that I developed my initial impressions of the groups and actors involved in the protests. Once I was assured of my access to the village for a longer-term stay I went back to Dhaka to participate in the NC activities taking place in the capital. Upon my return to Dhaka I had gained a better understanding of how the NC organises its movement at the local level, as well as how the village actors relate to activities organised by local activists based in the town. After another two months in Dhaka I returned to Borogram where I intended to stay until the end of my fieldwork, approximately nine months. During my stay I made

almost daily visits to Phulbari town, as this is the site where many villagers come for their daily necessities, such as buying food, selling vegetables and rice, and learning about the latest developments in the mining proposals and protest events from town activists. Along with exploring daily life and the social politics attached to ideas of resistance in the village, I tried to become a part of the communication between the village actors and the activists in the town. I ended my research with an additional two months of participation in the activities of the National Committee in the capital.

Clearly, my sites of enquiry move beyond the orthodox tradition of single-community based ethnographic exploration as I sought to find and engage with research subjects who were "displaced" from longstanding units of analysis - that is, community. This kind of methodological shift is nothing new in anthropology. The importance of such shifts has been noted in discussions of anthropological methods and locations in the contemporary world. Gupta and Ferguson, for example, have asked, "Why has there been so little anthropological work on the translocal aspects? Why do translocal phenomena of various kinds evade classical methods of participant observation? Why is it that, for example, local politics is so anthropological, whereas national or international politics is not? The household economy has long been considered eminently anthropological, but the study of unions much less so." [151] Reflecting on ethnographic tasks, Geertz has pointed out that, "Anthropologists don't study villages; they study *in* villages"[152]. Gupta & Ferguson[153] wonder why we have to study 'in villages' in the first place. They have argued that the objects of study in anthropology have traditionally been chosen according to a kind of ranking of the anthropological-ness of them. That is, things that did not look 'at home', 'different' or 'local', were considered as appropriate for anthropological study and places and phenomena that were some way closer or familiar to us were deemed to be non-anthropological.

These methodological issues received particular attention in the wake of anthropology's interest in translocalities in the contemporary era of 'globalism', for example, migration research. Working in more than one locality was already becoming an established practice in studies of migration, as they were following the trend of

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[151] Gupta and Ferguson, 1997. p. 15
[152] Geertz, 1973a. p. 22
[153] Gupta and Ferguson, 1997

observing both the points of departure and the points of arrival[154]. Thus, questions of studying "travelling cultures"[155] were already directing towards a renewed methodological scope. Traditionally, anthropological studies have faced methodological problems in studying issues that involve global processes. As Forman[156] points out, the problems were the methodological commitment to the local and the disciplinary preoccupation with the subaltern and concern with 'the other'. It is important to be able to follow the actors and issues in order to explore the global networks or the circulation of cultural meanings[157]. Eric Wolf similarly invited the anthropologist to move beyond the familiar local societies to explore the ways in which these are situated in the thread of global interconnections, and the power relations by which these connections are shaped[158]. In recent times, similar views as they relate to the methodological suggestions of multi-sitedness are emphasised in the analysis of various anthropologists [159]. The idea is to move away from a regionally described field to a conceptual field[160].

The idea of multi-sited ethnography is usually taken to imply that the anthropologist embarks on multiple fieldwork sites that are connected by mobile people or cultural representations; acknowledging spatial separation and, at the same time, overcome the spatial distance by focusing on the "simultaneity of linked events is distinct places"[161]. It contends to break the norms of taking the field as a particular set of social relations, which could be possibly compared with some other sets elsewhere[162]. The reformative argument to move beyond these norms was stressed by George E. Marcus (1995). He argued that the project of a multi-sited approach is to study social phenomena that cannot be totally grasped by examining a single site. As Falzon writes, reflecting on Marcus's points[163], it was a desire for a shift from anthropology's convention of seeing a 'world system' as a framework within which the local could be contextualised and compared to a realisation that the system was already embedded in multi-sited

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[154] See, Watson, 1977
[155] Clifford, 1997
[156] Forman, 1995. p. 7
[157] Marcus, 1995. pp. 95–117; Hendry, 2003. pp. 497–512
[158] Wolf, 1990. pp. 586-596; Marcus, 1998
[159] For example, Hannerz, 2003; Marcus, 1998
[160] Gupta and Ferguson, 1997. pp. 1-47
[161] Coleman, 2006. p. 35
[162] Falzon, 2009. p. 1
[163] Falzon, 2009. pp. 1-2

situations and objects of study. Falzon adds[164], the idea of a multi-sited research is to track people, connections, and associations across spatial difference. This implies, he notes, an ethnographic approach that takes into account that the field can be spatially dispersed as ethnographers try to engage with his or her objects of study; it implies the actual movement of the researcher in two or more places or the conceptual juxtaposition of places through techniques of data analysis. Despite variations in approaching the theme in some other articulations on multi-sitedness[165] the central focus of it remains on 'place(s)' or 'location(s)'. Falzon, for example, denies any possible suggestions that multi-sitedness can mean not only place or location but also perspective, and says perceiving it as synonymous with perspectivism may mean going back to the methodological practice it intended to reform[166].

The importance of such a methodological approach gains particular strength in the conceptual shift that challenges opposition between global and local, which is often taken for granted. Multi-sited ethnography seeks to connect sites rather then leave them in opposition. As Marcus argues, the approach is inspired by the notion of 'the global', rather than a nominated space, set in opposition to the 'local'[167]. When knowledge, ideas and objects are interconnected and flowing from one space to another, the traditional anthropological focus on to 'local' is not sufficient for understanding the dynamics of this flow which is, as Tsing notes, 'hurtling through space'[168].

A number of researchers have recently followed and then assessed the path they adopted suggested by the advocates of multi-sitedness. It would be relevant to bring their experience and assessment into the discussion of my methodological considerations. Kathryn Tomlinson[169] decided not to dwell in a single village and chose to travel between places and institutions in order to capture the role of the idea of indigenous rights in shaping political struggles over issues of access to land and natural resources in Venezuela. To understand how the meaning of land rights are re-appropriated in a conflict over the building of an electricity power line through

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[164] Falzon, 2009. p. 5
[165] See, i.e., Hannerz, 2003. pp. 201-16; Gustavson and Cytrynbaum, 2003. pp. 252-70
[166] Falzon, 2009. p. 2
[167] Marcus, 1995. p. 99
[168] Tsing, 2000. p. 331
[169] Tomlinson, 2011

indigenous lands, she followed the different actors, such as people involved in the conflict and people engaged in land demarcation, attached with her theme of exploration. To achieve this she moved between places, such as NGOs, offices of the electricity company and the offices of the central government in the capital Caracas, to the Indigenous People's Federation and regional offices of the electricity company, in two regional cities of Venezuela. Along with informal interviews and conversations she searched for data in the media archive and unpublished documents and communication papers relating to the conflict. She was led to the movement by her realisation that the process she was interested in was not so much taking place in the communities, but in meetings and conversations throughout the country. In assessing her lack of long term engagement with the research subjects and reflecting on the anxieties she faced in her doctoral viva for the examiner's concern, she discovered the unease and anxieties of the variation of multi-sited research that does not commit to participant observation.

Kanwal Mand[170] followed the members of transnational Shikh households to understand the ways in which mobility across places intersects with gendered identities and phases in the life course. To explore the women's journey through Tanzania, Indian Punjab, and London in their life phases she adopted Marcus's call for "following thing"[171] by tracking people, charting the movement of the objects, and collecting biographies and narratives. Reflecting on her own experiences she acknowledged the benefits of multi-sited enquiry to focus on 'subjects' who are also learners (like ethnographers) of the meanings of interconnection between places (Marcus[172] used the term para-ethnographer). Mand shared her experience of needing to use a number of data collection techniques, i.e. narratives and biographies, to bridge the distance and separation between the ethnographer and mobile key informants and between time and space.

Dinah Rajak[173] travelled between the corporate boardrooms of the Anglo American mining corporations in London and Johannesburg to the mineshafts of South Africa's platinum belt to explore the discourses and practises of corporate social responsibility (CSR) and how it is constructed and implemented within these sites. Her ethnographic

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[170] Mand, 2011
[171] Marcus, 1995
[172] Marcus, 1995
[173] Rajak, 2011

exploration involved less prosperous dwellings in the mining sites of Rustenburg, South Africa. In assessing the methodology she adopted, Rajak[174] points out that the multi-sited approach's ability in dealing with the construction of CSR "which simultaneously claim to be locally responsive, nationally aligned, and under-written by universal values"[175]. She finds that the "mobility and flexibility" of this approach allows focusing on 'connections (and disjunctures)" between the discursive ingredients of CSR (i.e. universalist ethical values, actual practices in local sites)[176]; but she shared that it was the actual practice and her efforts to grasp it that drove her ethnography of CSR, as it was the operational context within sites that needed to be captured.

My methodological direction was inspired by some of the possibilities and challenges of the multi-sited approach as shared in the above experiences. My ethnography was aimed at researching the organisation of a social movement that involves local and national actors and universalist ideas, and to explore the realities that shape the movement initiatives. My ethnographic quest raised questions around what should be focused on in studying the complexities of the organisation of the social movement. Critiques noted that the simple acknowledgement of the relations between the development of social movements and social ties of some kind were no longer adequately addressing the complexities of this relation[177]. MacAdam, for example, noted that it was important to specify the elements, such as attributes and emotional dynamics of individuals in relation to their attachment to social movement[178]. Tsing stressed the importance of illuminating how differences of places and ideas become inherent ingredients of collective actions[179]. My research focuses on situated emotions and attributes, and threads of collaboration and networks across spaces and ideas. For an ethnographer, understanding individual emotions and attributes traditionally means engaging with an individual's daily life and society where his or her experiences are shaped. To gather the threads of differences and commonalities between locations, the multi-sited approach offers the freedom and mobility to engage in more than one location. My ethnographic approach combined the significance of longer-term engagement in a 'community' with the enabling possibilities of multi-sited research. I

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[174] Rajak, 2011
[175] Rajak, 2011. p. 119
[176] Rajak, 2011. p. 120
[177] Diani and MacAdam, 2003
[178] McAdam, 2003
[179] Tsing, 2005

dwelled in a village of the proposed mining site for nine months to capture the everyday realities that shape local resistance, and I participated in the day-to-day activities of a national level activist group based in the capital to understand the processes of organisation of what was called the national movement in order to identify the connection and disjuncture between them.

Most of my research is ethnographic in the traditional sense. The majority of my field research was spent living in a village trying to immerse myself into the social life of a 'community'. When I was observing and enquiring into the activities of actors and organisations based at a distance from the community, I was primarily exploring the old anthropological devices of relations and sets of practices. As Ferguson argues[180], by reconceptualising objects as a set of practices and taking relations as primary, not the objects, we can address the new objects of study of multi-sited research however transcending they may be. The multi-sited approach offers the possibility of updating the principles of ethnography; it is not a call for getting rid of these principles. For Ferguson, even when we are engaging in multi-sited fieldwork we are actually maintaining the same ethnographic fundamentals of "constructing intelligible facts through contextualisation, through building webs of relations" by following relationships and interconnections across space[181].

To understand the dynamics of the social movement against planned mining in Phulbari, I had to understand a number of questions, such as, what are the local socio-political realities that inspire the resistance? What is the nature of the nationalistic ideas held by the movement activists in the capital, who organise the movement at national scale? How does an environmental NGO relate to the local realities of resistance? What is the nature of collaboration within the national activist groups called the National Committee? I looked at places beyond the community to understand these questions as I explored how and why resistance operates. I had to "carefully connect, to establish relations, to build context" to reach a comprehensive understanding of the processes that did not initially seem intelligible[182]. Even though I engaged myself in more than one location to reach intelligibility, these exploratory processes would sound familiar to conventional ethnographers. Some argue that the pioneer of ethnography, Malinowski,

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[180] Ferguson, 2011. p. 197
[181] Ferguson. 2011. p. 198
[182] Ferguson, 2011. p. 199

had gone multi-local in following Trobianders along the Kula ring. To understand Trobiand gardening he had to seek the political authority of chiefs which took him to the realms of gift exchange, matriliny, and so on, all of which had to be put in relation to each other in order to make sense of them[183]. Similarly, in the end, it was the situated realities, actual practices and relations between sets of practices that I, like most ethnographers, sought to grasp.

2. Dwelling in Borogram and politics of fieldwork

I have mentioned before that the majority of my research was conducted following conventional ethnographic endeavours of longer term dwelling in a 'community'. In preparation for this ethnographic mission I had to become aware of the processes and critics of ethnography in order to equip myself to deal with the 'puzzle' of fieldwork. Going into the field for such a long time and conducting fieldwork there was, indeed, puzzling, as I had only anticipated different fieldwork situations whilst sitting in my workspace far from the field sites. Being Bangladeshi and having been born and raised relatively close to my field sites I was supposed to be an 'indigenous ethnographer', however, my puzzle was not any less complicated than that of my fellow students going to a field far away from their home country. I was far removed from the 'community' in Phulbari and did not feel 'at home'[184]. Later in this section I will discuss some of the benefits and challenges I experienced during my fieldwork in the 'community' due to my 'nativeness'. A discussion about meanings and problems in ethnography will lead to those points.

The definition and meaning of ethnography is diverse. Sherry Ortner prescribes this frequently used and minimal definition, "[ethnography] has always meant the attempt to understand another life world using the self - as much as possible - as the instrument of knowing"[185]. The sense is that it is a process in which researchers engage themselves with 'another world' to understand it. This view is an echo of Malinowski's fieldwork tradition where ethnography entails making a description of the 'other' culture from a 'native' point of view[186]. Through participant observation, it is a process of 'initiation',

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[183] See, Ferguson, 2011. p. 198; Hannerz, 2003. p. 203
[184] Gupta and Ferguson, 1997
[185] Ortner, 1995. pp. 173-193
[186] Malinowski, 1992

variously designated as a puberty rite, ritual ordeal or rite of passage[187]. For Geertz, it is the meaning of social actions that ethnography strives to capture. He observed that ethnography reads cultures or social actions as 'texts'.

> "Doing ethnography is like trying to read (in the sense of 'construct a reading of') a manuscript - foreign, faded, full of ellipses, incoherencies, suspicious emendations, and tendentious commentaries, but written not in conventionalized graphs of sound but in transient example of shaped behaviour[188] ".

Interpretations must be made for the meanings of symbols 'read' in these actions by both researcher and subject [189]. 'Reading' or capturing the meaning of these symbolic acts is a slippery job. Geertz found it is like reading a poem, getting a joke or understanding a proverb[190]. The slipperiness of this job refers to processes of interpretation where multiple meanings ('readings') can be made of any particular action, poem or text, and where the ethnographer's subjectivity comes into play; "…what we call our data are really our own constructions of other people's constructions of what they and their compatriots are up to…"[191].

Ethnographic 'representation' has been questioned on a variety of grounds ranging from the researcher's position in the text and problems of translation, to the ethnographer's responsibility to the respondents. I will address the key issues raised in these criticisms to help position myself as a researcher. Asad's criticism of modern ethnography raised discussions as to the legitimacy of this technique. He links ethnographic representations to the colonial/imperial conceptual context[192]. As a result, anthropology was caught up in a complex historical web of colonial relations that, in turn, influenced ethnography[193]. Asad argues that the colonial power structure was used to gain access to the anthropological object of study and made possible 'the kind of human intimacy upon which anthropological fieldwork is based, but ensured that

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[187] Tedlock, 1991
[188] Geertz, 1973. pp. 3-30
[189] Marcus and Fischer, 1986. p. 26
[190] Geertz, 1974. pp. 26-45
[191] Geertz, 1973. p. 9
[192] Asad, 1973
[193] Jordan and Yeomans, 1995. p. 391

intimacy should be one-sided and provisional (1973: 17). Similarly, Said[194] argues that the notion of 'observer' in anthropological representations is based upon imperial discourse. In representing the 'other', he contends that early anthropologists constructed the Orient as inferior and the Occident as superior. It is this colonial discourse, where anthropological practice is rooted, that makes the 'native' inferior.

In response, post-modernists offer an alternative epistemological standpoint[195] to overcome the problems raised by Asad and Said. This school criticised traditional ethnographers as using subjective judgements and postulated that it creates a dualism between subject and object, theory and practice, and so on. In the process it captures a 'partial truth', a fiction of human understanding[196]. Post-modernists have criticised that the purpose of conventional ethnographic writing is to legitimise its authority and authenticity through textual devices; and to overcome this they offer to disperse the authority through dialogue and through allowing the 'native' voices to be heard[197].

However, such an approach also faces criticism for its ignorance of the processes through which ethnographic writing is carried out and its exclusive focus on the end product only[198]. The post-modern idea of dialogue is problematic as ethnographic writing can only draw on a few members of a heterogeneous society who might not represent the 'native' voice. Drawing on samples and edited interviews with the 'other' can no longer be considered more authentic as interpretation is ultimately influenced by the researcher[199]. Post-modernists, thus, fail to offer any revealing methodological solutions to the problem of 'representation' that they raise[200]. It is not to put down the questions raised in the analysis of post-modernists, but to make it more explicit that such limitations are inherent in the ethnographic representations. The textualist devices that post-modernists offer also fall into the trap of the problem of interpretation. Any account imposes dominance by carrying the interpreter's stamp. It is the author who ultimately makes data understandable and there is no interpretation that is not influenced by his/her own existential situation[201]. Ethnographers, thus, cannot claim

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[194] Said, 1978
[195] See, Marcus, George and Cushman, 1982. pp. 25-69; Clifford and Marcus, 1986
[196] Clifford and Marcus, 1986
[197] Tylor, 1986. p. 130
[198] Morean, 1988. pp. 1- 17
[199] Sutcliffe, 1993. p. 23
[200] Kapferer, 1998. pp. 77-104; Fardon, 1990
[201] Sutcliff, 1993

that there are texts that do not entail power. The ontological constitution inherently poses the relation of domination between writer and subject[202]. It would be problematic to deny that ethnographers, as writers, exert dominance textually. Rather by addressing these politics around fieldwork[203]explicitly into ethnographic accounts ethnographers can produce 'good enough'[204] text.

One can question whether being a 'native' researcher provides any help in this respect. Rabinow (1986) comments that anthropologists should shift their focus from the 'exotic other' to their own society and Clifford (1986) suggests that 'indigenous ethnographers' carry enormous advantages in representing their own 'native' society[205]. He notes, "insiders study their own cultures offering new angels of vision and depths of understanding, their accounts are empowered and restricted in many ways" (p.9). This raises questions as to what extent a native/non-native divide is a useful way of looking at an ethnographer's positionality. It may well be argued that anthropologists working in their own society carry their social background and their ontological construction, which can make the 'native' anthropologist an 'outsider'. In my case, my upper middle class orientation, educational background and attachment to 'city culture' made me an 'outsider' in the village where I conducted my fieldwork. Apart from that, 'outsider-ness' can be characterised by specific experiences derived from particular local situations. I will now reflect on my fieldwork and describe how, along with my socio-economic and educational background, the local experiences of an outsider in a village under the threat of displacement by mining development "blurred" [206] my native identity. The broader point I will address is, to what extent my ethnographic endeavour 'at home', and the power relations involved in these processes, was any less problematic.

Upon my arrival in Borogram for my first visit, one of the villagers shared a story with me. He said,

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[202] Sutcliffe, 1993. p. 24
[203] Escobar (1993) talked of thee sets of concretely interwoven politics- the politics of fieldwork (also Page, 1988; Tedlock, 1991), the politics within the text (also Clifford, 1988; Clifford and Marcus, 1986) and the contextual politics (also Fox, 1991).
[204] Scheper-Hughes, 1992
[205] Rabinow, 1986; Clifford, 1986
[206] Gardner, 1999. pp. 49-74

"One day a city guy like you came to the village and was talking nicely with us. He started to ask questions regarding our professions, income sources and so on. We asked him why he was asking these questions. He couldn't give us any satisfactory answer. We suspected that he was from Asia Energy and was trying to know about the village situation to make a plan for our displacement. We tied the person to a pole and left him there until one of our friends in Phulbari town assured us that he was an employee of Proshika [a credit service provider]. Few years before we had seen people like him coming to us and taking notes on papers. We didn't know much about the mining plan at that time. Now we realise that if we hadn't allowed them to survey the village it would have been difficult for them to make plans. Now we don't allow any outsider to come to our village and collect information about us"[207].

Noting the challenge I assured him, "I can promise you I am not from Asia Energy. I am here to study as part of my degree at my University."

To this he replied, "We don't understand your degree and your university. Its just we need to know more about you. It might be dangerous for you if you still want to roam around the village now. People don't like outsiders roaming in the village. We are all very alert now."

At that moment I felt quite helpless. Although I eventually convinced the village groups that I was not there to collect information for the mining corporation, my Bangladeshi identity did not help in any way to alleviate the uncertainties attached to the people's experiences and perceptions of 'outsiders'. To negotiate their suspicions and doubts I had to use several strategies. Sometime I took my early village contacts with me when I wanted to be introduced to someone I had not met before. Sometimes an activist from Phulbari town would introduce me to a village group during discussions of mining and protest issues. "Ethnographers may have to correct, negotiate, even alter their role in interacting with their subjects. These modifications lead an ethnographer into an interactive process, representing a newly established relationship"[208]. In the subsequent months my identity was constantly contested and

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[207] Field Notes; February 5, 2009
[208] Page, 1998. p. 165

negotiated as I was exposed to the complexities of the relations between my informants and myself. Ideas of the simple native/non-native demarcation were challenged.

My affiliation with a UK university influenced the dimensions of my relations with my subjects. The UK is mentioned in discussions of mining and protests as the place where Asia Energy is located. I was advised by some of the activists in Phulbari town that I should not disclose my attachment with the UK in the village, as the people would be very suspicious about someone coming from the same place as Asia Energy. Although I did not feel that it was right to hide things, my affiliation with the UK created significant confusion among my informants. Their suspicions grew even stronger when it was imagined that I might have had hidden relations with Asia Energy and had come to the village in the guise of a university student. These suspicions were vocalised to me during the following conversation:

Village resident: *You live in* London...*such rich country! Why are you spending your time in this village? What you could learn from here? What is here to learn?*

Me: I am here to learn about the protests.

Village resident: *It doesn't take months to learn about protests, does it? We have told what we know. If you don't mind - when will you leave?*

Me: I want to live here so that I can observe things more and talk to more people. I need to learn more and stay here to write my exam papers.

Village resident: *Listen, people are asking questions about you. I don't want to hurt you but people in the hat [village market] were saying you might go back to London and contact with Asia Energy and disclose things they want to know.* He smiled.

This is an example of how elements attached to my background created uncertainties that were beyond my control. My background influenced my relations with my informants and my ethnographic relations with the field. This takes me to Clifford's reminder that "even the best ethnographic texts -serious, true fictions- are systems, or

economies of truth. Power and history work through them, in ways their authors cannot fully control"[209].

Language was another aspect that disturbed my efforts to understand the local idioms and some subtle expressions. Borogram village generally spoke a particular pattern of Bengali dialect that they called *Chapai vasha (Chapai language).* As I will discuss in Chapter Five, the village was established by migrants, people who had been displaced from their land in a northern district called Chapainawabganj by river erosion. This river erosion forced people from the Chapainawabganj area to follow the first set of migrants to the new place composed of residents from the village. The Bengali dialect they spoke was identified as their *ashol vasha* (original language), which consisted of certain lexical and phrasal characteristics that posed difficulties for me in communicating with my informants. Local people sometimes had different ways of expressing themselves and used the same word for different purposes, or with different meanings. "My son has gone to *bidesh*," said one of my informants in a conversation with me. In my *shohure* (town) *bidesh* means a foreign country, but in local Chapai vasha *bidesh* can mean either a town far from the village or a foreign country, depending on the context of the conversation. My informant clarified that he meant his son went to find work in Dhaka between harvesting seasons when there was not enough work in the village. "I built my house last year," one man said to me, meaning that he had married last year. My inability to understand the language despite being Bangladeshi made me an outsider in the village. As one man said with a smile, "You are *bideshi manush* [foreign people]; how would you understand our *vasha?*" It was only through my longer-term associations with the village that, like any other ethnographer, I was gradually able to gain an understanding of the invasiveness and contextual meanings of some of the local idioms and phrases. I had to constantly 'negotiate' my Bengali knowledge with the one practiced in the village.

This process is what Page[210] called a communicative exchange that occurs under certain 'dialogical conditions' and within specific a 'historical climate'. As Page notes, the dialogical condition is not merely a conversation between two parties, but is a process of exchange between ethnographer and subject where both assess each other's role.

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[209] Clifford, 1986. p. 7
[210] Page, 1998

This is an interactive process that guides ethnographers to a newly established relationship that is 'constituted dialogically'[211]. In the process, "ethnographic approaches may be negotiated and modified, methodology may be called into question or even suspended if negative emotions associated with conflicting definitions of the situation occurs"[212]. This provides a researcher with the flexibility and opportunity to look back at any challenging situations they face and to assess and reconfigure the position of 'self' in relation to 'others'. A conversation with a local Mulla (religious leader) provided me such an opportunity.

Participating in the Bichar (village court)[213] was an important field strategy for me to understand the functioning of social relations in Borogram. This community gathering serves as a platform for local disputes to be discussed, judged or mediated by the leaders of the village in agreement with other present villagers. I will now present my conversation with a local Mulla (religious leader) as it occurred during a Bichar organised to provide judgement in the case of a family dispute.

Mulla: *You have come today as well?*

Me: Yes, I have come to participate in the Bichar. Is it ok?

Mulla: *You can't attend the Bichar today. Today we have women here. Females will not speak in front of unknown persons.*

Me: Ok I will leave if you want but I have spoken to the females present here before and they have talked to me gladly.

Mulla: *Did you take permission of their husband before you talked to them?*

Me: Yes. I think their husbands are present here. If you want, and if they want, I will leave.

Mulla: *Women should not speak in front of unknown persons. It is* haram *[religiously prohibited] in Islam. If their husband permitted you I would say they should not have done so. It would be good if you don't come when females are here. I don't understand*

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[211] Page, 1998. p. 165
[212] Page, 1998. p. 163
[213] An elaborate account of the functioning of Bichar is presented in Chapter Five.

why do you have to come to these Bichars? What do you have to learn from here? You better don't come to Bichars.

Though the women and their husbands, who were present, said they did not have any problem speaking in front of me, I decided to leave the Bichar to avoid any misunderstanding with the Mulla. I stopped participating in Bichar where female members attended as I felt this was a better strategy for my immersion. After a few weeks, I went to the Mulla's house to talk about my research and to clarify my purposes for wanting to participate in Bichar. He promised me that he would speak it over with the other Mullahs' in the village. A few days later I was called to his home and was asked to explain my purpose of participating in the Bichars to two other Mullahs. Upon hearing my explanation one of the Mullahs stated: "If participating in Bichars helps your work you can participate there. Our women maintain *purdah* (veil) when they come to Bichars. Females can speak in front of outsiders if they maintain *purdah*."

The social authority and power of Mullahs as religious leaders challenged my position of 'self'. The ethnographic reality I faced here and the way I negotiated with the Mullahs can be seen as what Page (1998)[214] called interactive learning between the ethnographer and the respondent. I felt very much of an outsider in these instances and I had to strategise ways of responding to these situations by trying to convince the Mullahs or, in failing to do so, by leaning towards his fellow Mullahs. The ethnographic narrative produced within these contexts was powered by, like Narayan's[215] experience, my sensitivity to the various ways in which I interacted with members of the community, sometimes aligned with particular groups, sometime set apart. Despite being a Bangladeshi Muslim I was treated as an outsider in the Bichar by the religious leader. The anti-essentialist interpretation of 'self', thus, becomes somewhat blurred as it relates to the personal experiences in ethnographic text[216]. The example presented above can be seen as a reversal of power relations. A large part of the conversation presented above can be read as 'respondents' making the researcher their subject to carefully scrutinise and reach an informed decision. Indeed, as Page[217]

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[214] Page, 1998
[215] Narayan, 1993. p. 675
[216] Gardner, 1999
[217] Page, 1998. p. 165

argues, ethnographic fieldwork is always a dialogic, power laden and conflictive process, regulated by dual agency.

It can be argued that I was better equipped than a foreigner for ethnographic work in a Bangladeshi village since I had a great deal of prior understanding of the study area. Being a 'local', I, like all others in Bangladesh, have been following the protest events published in local media. I had acquired a lot of background information about the Phulbari movement, such as local issues of land ownership and the threat of displacement by the mining corporation, which I had obtained through my previous associations with some of the academicians involved in the movement. My familiarity with certain notions of land ownership in rural Bangladesh helped a great deal to grasp the relations between distinct land ownership patterns in Borogram and the resistance to the mine. Though my Muslim identity was not much help in placing me as a native in certain social realms, as evidenced above, it did allow me to participate in certain social spaces, such as in religious discussions at the local Mosques after *Jummas* (Friday prayer) where villagers occasionally discussed cases of village conflicts and sought the views of the *Musulli* (participants of religious discussion). This is one way that the frame and functioning of *Samaj* (solidarity group/ 'community') became visible to me. I have provided examples of how my Bengali skills were not adequate in understanding certain shorthand idioms and some invasive expressions, but I was definitely in a more advantageous position than a foreign ethnographer to negotiate these difficulties. I was well prepared to engage in interactive communication and to understand linguistic nuances attached to cultural attributes. Having grown up in Bangladesh and having had previous exposure to the area as part of my involvement in a community development project in Phulbari, it was easier for me to interpret the local meaning of some narratives, gestures, and body language. This is not to celebrate my role as a 'local' anthropologist compared to an 'outsider' anthropologist. This is to state that Clifford's call of 'indigenous ethnographer' can be seen as partially credible[218].

No doubt, my position as a researcher was 'subjective', but strenuous efforts were made to produce a 'good enough' ethnography by accommodating post-modern critiques and a commitment to 'true description' in line with Scheper-Huges's experience. "Even though I make no claims to privileged scientific mentality, I do try

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[218] Ahmed experienced his Bangladeshi ethnographer identity in the same way during the process of researching agricultural practices in a Bangladeshi *char* village. See, Ahmed, 2000. pp. 203-209

to offer a fair and true description and analysis of events and relationships as I have perceived and sometimes participated in them[219]".

3. Research strategies

As previously mentioned, the majority of my research was conducted through participant observation in a village located in the proposed mining site of Phulbari in the northern district of Dinajpur, Bangladesh. During my nine months of dwelling in Borogram village I participated in a wide range of daily, routine and periodic activities to explore the realms of 'community relations' and 'private' spheres and their relations with local resistance to the mine. Participating in Bichar, religious discussions at the mosques, evening *adda* (idle chat) at village tea stalls and in marriage ceremonies are some examples of social events that I regularly participated in. Following the conventional manners of ethnographic observation, staying 'there' was my main strategy and included informally observing leisure activities such as hanging out with informants and using everyday conversation as an interview technique. 'Going native'[220] was not possible, as I have discussed, neither did I pretend that it was. Understanding the meaning of resistance by observing the everyday spheres of the village was the idea, and using participant observation as a research strategy lent to blurring boundaries between my informants and myself or of insider/outsider connotations[221].

Interpretation of 'data' accompanies the processes of participant observation. Anthropologists face problems when interpreting 'data' collected through participant observation. Rabinow[222] comments that: "You are not an anthropologist until you have the experience of doing it. But when one returns from the field the opposite immediately applies: anthropology is not the experiences which made you an initiate, but only the objective data you have brought back"[223]. However, it is critical to recognise that the ethnographic techniques of representation are shaped 'not only by the kind of data collected but also the manner in which those data were obtained'[224]. It

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[219] Scheper-Hughes, 1992. p. 25
[220] Jorgenson, 1989
[221] Spradley, 1980. p. 57; Gardner, 1999
[222] Rabinow, 1997
[223] Rabinow, 1997. p. 10
[224] Gupta, 1998. p. 29

would not claim that the 'data', the feelings and the narratives that I would like to capture, would be 'objective'. I am aware of the fact that the way I plan to conduct my 'fieldwork' creates concerns about the problematic self/other relations, the problem of representations and the nature of anthropological voice and authority it involves[225].

I also participated in the regular activities of the National Committee, a national forum of left leaning political parties and sympathetic individuals, who organises the movement at the national level. I began by hanging out with some activists of the NC to gain enough of their trust to allow me to participate in the organisational activities of the committee. As I spent more time with them my association with the activists became more 'natural' and the relationship became less formal. The length of association enabled 'natural' interactions to be observed and participated in[226]. This allowed me to participate in the regular organising meetings of the committee, held three to four times a month, to discuss the issues of protests and issues around organising particular protest events. I also attended NC monthly coordination meetings where members who are representatives of different political parties discuss their views on issues around the mine and protest activities. Other regular activities of the committee included organising discussions with sympathetic professionals, such as engineers or geologists, environmental NGOs involved in the movement such as *Bangladesh Paribesh Andolon* (BAPA), and committee members. Participating in these discussions and the organisation of events helped me to explore the actors and groups, and the agendas they promote. During my fieldwork I participated in a number of NC protest events, such as protest rallies, processions, street marches and hunger strikes, that deepened my understanding of the organisation of the movement.

Though my aim was to engage in 'natural' interactions with the actors in the NC, I was often viewed as an 'artificial' participant of the organising and coordination meetings. During the first few instances some of my early contacts introduced me as an acquainted researcher; this was one of the ways that I earned access into the spheres of the committee. However, I was not usually asked to present any views and I was not usually given a turn to ask any questions. My participation was, thus, at times, limited to simply observing the proceedings and listening to what was talked about. This,

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[225] Spencer, 1989. pp. 154-64
[226] Ostberg, 2003

however, changed to some extent as I extended my participation to street protests and demonstrations. I, like other activists participating in the events, began to reflect on how the protests went in the post-event meetings. The balance between my roles as researcher and a participant in the activism had to be established in the process, as I constantly kept my informants, and myself, aware of my research motives to avoid any undue expectations regarding my role in the movement.

I conducted informal interviews and collected oral histories from the participants of protest activities in the village in Phulbari town and in the capital. The history of the protests was documented through these oral accounts. Oral histories provided me the capability to textualise people's knowledge and identity. As Wendy Singer comments, oral history undercuts post-modern arguments concerned with the fixity of text and authority because it is continually changing and shifting[227]. Collecting narratives helped to understand issues, such as why people participated in the protests and how they organised themselves during the events and moments of protests[228]. Narrative is spontaneous representations of both history and the present and has a central function in complex relations.[229]

In addition to my fieldwork in Phulbari I conducted interviews 'by appointment' with officials and actors in an environmental NGO called Bangladesh Paribesh Andolon (BAPA) that promoted the environmental agenda in the Phulbari movement and collaborated with the National Committee on certain protest activities. I made contact with some of the actors in BAPA through my participation in coordination meetings arranged by the National Committee where members of BAPA often attended. I had friendly conversations, or 'speech events'[230], with them during those meetings, which were followed by in-depth interviews at a set time and place. The in-depth interviews helped explore the role of BAPA in propagating discourses of environment and how they were connected with other ideas and groups, i.e. villagers in the mine site, in the movement. The interviews helped to explore the informant's thoughts and

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[227] Singer, 1998. p. 7

[228] I take Good's (1994) definition of narrative. For Good, "Narrative is a form in which experience is represented and recounted, in which events are presented as having a meaningful and coherent order, in which activities and events are described along with the experiences associated with them and the significance that lend them their sense for the persons involved". p. 139

[229] For a discussion of Narrative as an important analytical tool in studying complex social relations, See, John and Comarroff, 1991

[230] Spradley, 1979

understandings of the issues of environment and the Phulbari mine project, as well as their experiences of involvement in the movement's activities both at the national and local level. Interviews were beneficial in identifying BAPA actors involved with the Phulbari movement and also helped to explore their experiences of the background and agendas of the organisation. Interviews, however, are conducted within a structured setting and the narratives they produce do not carry the context of participatory engagement. I was aware that the narratives produced from my BAPA interviews, while often enthusiastic and well-versed in presenting the importance of their organisation in the movement and the role and value of environmental agendas, were influenced by a rhetorical edge.

A clearer picture of the role and views of BAPA was obtained through participation in National Committee meetings in Dhaka where representatives of BAPA participated. These meetings were organised periodically to press the demands of the protesters and were generally held in a meeting room at the office of the Communist party of Bangladesh in Dhaka. The National Committee also used the office of the Communist Party for their regular organisational discussions. For me, this office became a place for interacting with the activists. Participation in their discussions helped explore the agendas BAPA brought to the movement.

4. Ethical issues

The root of present philosophical premises of research ethics and codes takes us to elements of the Enlightenment doctrine, based as it is in concepts of radical freedom and self-determinism, to ensure 'neutrality between different conceptions of the good'[231]. In a society of diverse beliefs, traditions, religions and occupations, 'value neutrality' was considered the light of Enlightenment. This 'value neutrality' led to 'value-free experimentalism' in social sciences with reference to ethical issues such as moral deliberation, choice and accountability on the part of the researcher throughout the research process[232]. Postmodernists have reflected on the complexity around the notion of 'neutrality' and 'objectivity' when it comes to ethnographic research and pointed out the 'authority' of researchers in 'field' research (Clifford and Marcus, 1986

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[231] Christians, 2000. p. 134
[232] Melanie at el, 2002. p. 6

for example)[233]. I have discussed some of the key arguments of this school in the methodology section. I have also hinted that an awareness of a post-modern critic's viewpoints and a commitment to 'true description' can produce, in Scheper-Hughes terms, 'good enough'[234] ethnography. Different ethical guidelines or codes have come into being to guide the field research process, most of which generally focus on, 1. objectivity and integrity, and 2. disclosure of rights applicable to the research population. Objectivity and integrity refers to the researcher's effort to maintain these characteristics in the research process; the disclosure of the rights of the research population refers to a researcher's awareness of power relations, wealth, and status disparities between the researcher and the researched.

Maintaining objectivity and integrity is influenced by several interrelated factors. Researchers and their positionality, or 'who you are and what you do', can greatly influence the research process[235]. My interest in researching the dynamics of ongoing resistance to a multinational mining corporation, Asia Energy, in Phulbari grew from a particular background. Before coming to the University of Sussex to do an M.A in 2006, I was in contact with national activist groups that were collaborating with local communities to strengthen the protests against Asia Energy. As mentioned earlier, these groups of activists involved university teachers and academics, some of who are from my alma mater, Jahangirnagar University in Dhaka. Because of this connection, I was a keen follower of the development of the Phulbari movement and my position in this context was also influenced by the ideas and views, often inclined to anti-colonialist or nationalist discourses, of some of the activists from the National Committee. This pre-orientation about the Phulbari resistance from the perspective of a particular activist group posed some challenges while conducting anthropological research to understand the protest. These challenges were overcome by an even greater orientation towards the different theories and examples of social movements, and complexities involving community resistance. Pre-fieldwork training helped me prepare intellectually and methodologically to overcome any pre-assumptions arising from my positionality within the context.

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[233] Clifford and Marcus, 1986
[234] Scheper-Hughes, 1992
[235] Abu-Lughod, 1991; Mohanty, 1988; Narayan, 1997; Said, 1978

A researcher's complex subjectivity arising from crosscutting identities may also impact their relationship with the researched[236]. My Bangladeshi identity, my language, my religion and my familiarity with the field, as I mentioned before, certainly positioned me in comfortable situations while conducting my field research. But it becomes less comfortable when it has come to writing my findings. The question asked by an activist, "how would your work help the movement?" created an ethical dilemma on my part and is indicative of the multiple accountabilities I am called to. As an anthropologist I write for other anthropologists, yet at the same time the activists of the movement, with whom I have developed a social relation with over the period of my field engagement, call upon my accountability. In addition, my writing is subject to scrutiny by the educated activists. My previous associations with Dhaka-based activists add to the dilemma of how and what I write, or do not write, about the activism. My background in anthropology and my connections with the activists presents the challenge of positioning me "with reference to two communities"[237]. While writing I constantly attend to these positionalities to minimize the problem of 'positioned truths'[238] in the representation. Also, I must maintain a balance between multiple accountabilities in order to address my responsibilities towards my subjects and my commitment to 'good ethnography'.

This was not an easy task; I broadly share the values and emotions of the activists who are predominately members of left-liberal political parties trying to uphold the promise of 'secular' social ideologies as opposed to ideals based on Islamic principles propagated by the pre-independent Pakistan State (see Chapter Three). I also share the values that inform the political agenda of *'Dharma Niropekhhata'* (which literally translates to 'religious neutrality') held by left political activists. My moral position lends support to the activist's demand to remove Islam as the state religion as is inscribed in the constituency of Bangladesh. Within the context of activism against the mine, protest messages, as we will see, take on anti-colonialist and anti-imperialist sentiments. This led me to face the difficult question of whether I should support the activists rather than conduct an 'objective' inquiry into the dynamics of the protests that may reveal message fragments. In sharing the experience of Nayanika Mukherjee's ethnographic encounters within left-liberal politics in Bangladesh the relationship

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[236] Rosaldo, 1986; Narayan, 1997; Abu-Lughod, 1991
[237] Abu-Lughod, 1991. p. 155
[238] Abu-Lughod, 1991. p. 157

between the researcher and the activists becomes "even more complicated in the context of activism that seeks redress for colonialism, imperialism…"[239]

The dilemma has presented itself as whether I should take the side of the activists to help strengthen the protests and circulate straightforward and uniform anti-mining agendas, or look for situated realities that different groups experience and that, in turn, inform the protests of different groups. The Dhaka-based activists asked me to write for *Meghbarta*, an e-magazine run by the anti-mining activists, to help strengthen their web-based activism.

> "You now know the misery people would face if the mining takes place. You have lived there, talked with them; you have seen how much people in Phulbari hate Asia Energy's mining proposal. You can tell others what you have learned there. Why don't you write for us? We are collecting writings for our websites" (an activist involved in managing Meghbarta).

This certainly added to the dilemma of what I should and should not write. My ethnographic engagement with the village people in Phulbari revealed, as we will see, aspects of collaboration and friction of ideas and experiences as people came to engage with the protests movements; this is what my research intended to explore at different levels of the protests. My writings for Meghbarta, if based on my methodological exploration, would definitely demand some form of formatting as per the general tone of the 'anti-Asia Energy' sentiment of the magazine.

I chose not to write for the magazine. Instead I tried to take solace in the very incitement of the activist: 'you can tell others what you have learned there'. This is not to say that 'neutrality' is what I have sought. I subscribe to Mookherjee's suggestion that whether we can take sides "needs to be examined in the context of the historical and moral political trajectories within which such engagement takes place"[240]. For the moment I "ask the awkward questions":[241] to what extent, and how, do ideas held by different groups form the protests.

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[239] Mookherjee, 2008. p. 84
[240] Mookherjee, 2008. p. 85
[241] Lindisfarne, 2002. p. 420

My connection with the national activists and their co-activists in Phulbari town helped me gain access into the village for field research. The beneficial features of a 'native' researcher also contained the risk of creating an ambivalent relationship with the community members. Accessing the community with the help of an activist group could have labelled me to the community as a member of an activist group. To minimise this, my research purpose, possible consequences, and the use of my research were clearly explained to the activist groups and to the community people I encountered. However, it was impossible to explain my research purpose to everyone in the community who I observed, spoke to or listened to. Under the conditions of long-term participant observation I sometimes observed people from a distance; sometimes I observed passively without face-to-face contact, sometimes I listened to people from a distance. Obtaining informed consent in all of these ethnographic settings would not be possible for an ethnographer looking to engage in 'formal and informal' manners. Even in suitable situations where I explained my research purposes I encountered some other inherent problems with 'informed consent'.

People in Borogram sometimes did not understand the explanation of my academic research because of the differences between my language and local (*Chapi*) dialects. Some local people asked for further clarification before they would agree to talk to me about my research. In doing so, they sometimes had different ways of expressing themselves. 'Explanations offered by people may be expressed…in idioms signalling distrust, as ethnic norms or as uncertain exploratory hypothesis'[242]. There was no simple solution to this problem. The entire issue of informed consent is problematic[243]. This is a general problem for field research, which I tried to minimise through my longer-term ethnographic interactions with the people of Borogram. I acknowledged this problem during the initial stages of gaining informed consent. My familiarity with the research area might not have helped overcome this problem totally, but it did help to minimise it.

The ethical dilemma I faced was in my responsibility to the people and organisations I studied. For Starn[244] and Scheper-Hughes[245], anthropological research should aim to

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[242] Fairhead quoted in Mosse, 1994. p. 499; Fairhead, 1993
[243] Ackeroyd, 1984. p. 147
[244] Starn, 1994
[245] Scheper-Hughes, 1995

have a positive impact on the researched people rather then being 'cold' and 'objective'. This takes us back to the debate about the meaning of anthropology itself. I do not wish to enter into this debate around the relative merit of 'political activist ethnography'[246] or 'activist research', but I feel that the point raised by Starn and Scheper-Hughes has important implications as to the kind of relationship I was required to build with my research subjects while employing an ethnographic method. While communicating with the National Committee and explaining my research and objectives for participant observation in the committee, I was asked to explain how my research would benefit the movement and protesters. Participant observation in Borogram required intense personal relationships with the protesters. This kind of relationship made it difficult to separate 'facts' from 'emotions'. Any research in the community should help the people rather than hinder them[247]. These are the debates that complicate my ethical position and create some dilemmas. As I carried out my field research and writings I have kept these issues in mind and worked hard to ensure that these dilemmas have not had a significant impact on my research.

Maintaining the anonymity and confidentiality of research subjects is a key consideration in most ethical guidelines. Safeguarding people's confidentiality, not using their names and reference, is the usual process. However, in this case it was impossible to totally ensure the anonymity of public figures. The position of the General Secretary of the National Committee was one such example where it was not possible secure anonymity; some unavoidable descriptions of my research processes would inevitably reveal his identity. In these situations I was assured by my informants that they did not have any objections to their names or identities being revealed. However, extra care had to be taken to create feelings of trust when interacting with people involved in activism. In cases where names and identities were obvious I have adopted pseudonyms in my text, and statements and information have been used in a way that will not harm their confidentiality.

It was not possible to assure my informants about the possible use of my thesis, as these reports can be accessed by university students, be quoted in different publications, and can be shared in seminars and with wider audiences verbally. Also, my responsibility

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[246] Smith, 2005
[247] Starn, 1994; Scheper-Hughes, 1995

towards the ESRC, who are funding my research, compels me to make the reports available to stakeholders so it can be disseminated to wider audiences. There is the potential risk of creating a misunderstanding between my informants and I about how informant's views are being represented through research reports. To minimise this problem, in line with the suggestion of James (2001)[248], I used a lot of original quotes in the text to avoid any misinterpretation of information and observation. This will help to avoid over interpretation of what a research subject has said or done, thus, 'moving away from ethnographic authority'. Having said that, I do acknowledge that it is the author in the end, who controls what quotes are included and excluded, and the manner and context in which they are used[249].

Before focusing on my empirical data, I will discuss the historical background to the political conditions within which the present-day movement against the mine operates. In the **next chapter** I present an analysis of how the negative image of a 'foreign company' was historically formed through the policies of the East India Company in Bengal. The main discussion focuses on the political discourses and practices that inform the Bangladeshi political field. I start with a discussion of the history of the agrarian struggle in the Dinajpur region and a scholarly analysis of the nature of these struggles to establish how this informs my analysis of the protests against mining planned in Phulbari.

This is followed by a more context specific discussion in **Chapter Four**, which explores how 'nationalism', as a central discourse of dissent, is played out in the movement against the mine. Organised protests against mining in Phulbari are often propagated as a 'national' movement to protect 'national interests' by an activist group based in the capital, in collaboration with groups and actors based at both the local level and within the capital. The chapter explores the idioms of nationalism, characterised by the concerns of 'national interests, that play a significant role in the dissent around mining, and discusses how the ideas of 'national interests' are internally varied.

What does anti-mining mean at the local level? **Chapter Five and Six** discuss the complexities and situated realities of resistance to the Phulbari mine. **Chapter Five**

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[248]James, 2001
[249] James, 2001. p. 32-33

presents ethnographic descriptions and the background of Borogram village, the site for the planned mine, where I was engaged for a longer period of time. It begins with a discussion around the social structure of rural Bangladesh, which, as evidenced by some critical analyses, is distinct throughout the country's different regions. The main body of the chapter is focused on aspects of the social structure and relations within a particular village of Borogram. To provide a clear picture of the village's social settings, the history of the village's establishment is described, detailing the groups of people who had migrated from river affected northern districts of Bangladesh. The notion of 'community' and the functionality of certain social processes, such as the 'bichar' (village court), 'Samaj' (solidarity group) and the patterns of land relations, are discussed to provide an understanding of the complexities and particularities of social relations in Borogram. An ethnographic account of the history of the village, together with notions of certain social functions and land relations, are presented in order to demonstrate how these are implicated in the production of a 'Chapai village', as it is locally called, with its distinct socio-political characteristics. Details of the context of social relations and the make-up of the village provide a background for the discussions in **Chapter Six** (Part One) where I explore how local resistance is embedded in distinct socio-political characteristics of Borogram. This is followed by a discussion in Chapter Six Part Two where I show how, at another level, a localised movement builds around an actor's own 'moral commitment' to control the tangible and intangible benefit that arise from the protests.

In **Chapter Seven** 'friction' between disparate ideas and observations that characterise the organisation of the Phulbari movement is explored. To achieve this, I first examine the make-up of the forum that organises protests at the national level through its branches located throughout Bangladesh, including in the mining sites of Phulbari town, the National Committee. The left-oriented National Committee, with its propagation against global and foreign capital, is formed by members with varied, and sometimes conflicting, opinions and observations of the movement. I discuss how members of the National Committee negotiate these divergences by putting their differences aside and finding commonalities. An environmental NGO, whose motivations lie within the global environmental agenda, gets in the way of this compromise for a common space of protest. I reflect on the efforts of collaboration between the Borogram 'community' and the environmental NGO and present examples

of how disparate observations of certain ideas about the environment, such as the protection of the forest, finds spaces of compatibility in strengthening the protests. This is not a smooth integration of ideas and knowledge within the network of resistance. I argue that the processes of connection are characterised by conflicts, and these conflicts open up the possibilities for networks of resistance.

Chapter Three

Political discourse and practice: historical context

Outline

The aim of this chapter is to present the histories of socio-political processes in Bangladesh in order to establish the background to the present social and political environment in which the protests against the UK-based global mining company operate.

I draw on some informative analyses of the socio-political histories in the Bengal province, a major part of which later became independent Bangladesh. This extensive engagement with history is important to provide a background to the discourses and practice of activism. History is conceived of as a discursive tool in this thesis as it informs the ideas and agendas of the groups involved in the protests. As we shall see, 'nationalist ideas', cemented historically, (often characterised by anti-colonial languages and an 'anti-foreign corporations' position) in the current context play an important role in the workings of the movement against the mine.

I discuss how a British trading company in India, the East India Company, began to turn into a military entity, and how its trading policies during the colonial period formed a 'negative' collective image of foreign companies in Bengal.

The next section presents the background for the creation of Pakistan and historical evidence of the varying inspirations contained in the image of a desired 'Muslim community' that were attached to the idea of its independence. The second part of this section is concerned with the breakdown of Pakistan and the emergence of an independent Bangladesh, sketching the socio-political context within which the new country emerged. In the third part, this historical context is used in an analysis of how idioms of Bengali nationalism did not take a 'modular' form, and were subject to revision by internal 'cleavages'. The last section is concerned with political conditions and practices of dissent in Bangladesh; the chaos in the political and economic fields of a post-independent Bangladesh that gradually shifted from a 'socialist' character to one of private and foreign investment. These sketch the terrain of protests.

I began by looking at the histories of struggle in the Dinajpur region and the scholarly analyses regarding the nature of these struggles. Let us start with these.

1. Struggle in Dinajpur: a historical background

Dinajpur[1] has its history of organised struggle and resistance during both pre and post colonial eras. Some veterans are still involved in present day activism against mining in Phulbari for, some would say similar, some would say different, reasons. This research explores these discrepancies in further detail.

The following section explores the history of struggle in Dinajpur and the scholarly debates around the nature of these struggles. Particular attention has been paid to debates concerning the possibilities of alliances within the struggles, a central theme of the thesis.

Organised struggle in Dinajpur historically centred around land relations and land rights, and mainly carried out by people directly involved in land cultivation, known as sharecroppers and the landless. The system of land tax collection under colonial rule through tiers of landlords (zamindars) proved to be exploitative for the cultivators[2]. Large-scale zamindars used to underlet their land to smaller-scale zamindars who came from the local rich class. The smaller-scale landlords used to sublet it again to actual cultivators (sharecroppers) at an 'advanced rate or for half the produce'[3]. Some local zamindars with huge amounts of land also existed in this part of Bengal[4] whose acts of exploitation towards their under-tenants were recorded by writers such as Buchanan Hamilton and Colebrooke[5]. As Colebrooke noted, "the undertenants depressed by an excessive rent in kind and by usurious returns for the cattle, seed and subsistence advance to them can never extricate themselves from debt…whenever the system of an

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[1] Dinajpur district today represents only part of greater Dinajpur area of the colonial and pre-colonial period that extended over a much larger area of both East Bengal (present Bangladesh) and West Bengal (in India) with India's Jalpaiguri, Kochbihar, Darjeeling to its north and Purnia, West Dinajpur, Maldaha, Murshibabad to the west and Bangladesh's Padma river to the South and Bramhaputra river to the East. Much of the northern part of present Bangladesh was under Dinajpur area (Bangladesh District Gazetteer: Dinajpur, 1991; Rangpur, 1990; Bagura, 1989; Rajshahi, 1976; Pabna, 1978).
[2] among others see, Majumdar, 1993; Sinha, 1968
[3] Colebrooke, 1866 (Original 1794). p. 125
[4] Asok Majumdar, 1993
[5] Hamilton,1833; Colebrooke, 1866

intermediate tenancy subsists, the sharecropper is indignant, the husbandry ill-managed"[6].

From the advent of colonial rule, British rulers and their nominated Dinajpur zamindars frequently encountered unrest from the cultivators. The last of the large-scale movements was 'Tebhaga' during 1946-47, and was also the most organised sharecroppers' movement in 20th century Bengal[7]. Memories of the Tebhaga movement can still be found in the narratives of local veteran residents, some of whom directly participated in the movement in the locality of this research. Tebhaga is a local Bengali term which means two-thirds of the produce. Like the name of the movement, the demand for Tebhaga was for two-thirds instead of a half share of the sharecropper's produce. Sharecroppers were the tenants of local landlords who used to sublet agricultural land for half the produce and without any permanent rights to the land. Sharecroppers had to bear the cost of production along with the labour. This sharecropping system did not put any obligation on the part of the landlord to provide the capital for production. Also, landlords could cancel any tenancy at their will and evict the farmers from the land. The crop was usually taken to the landlords' threshing ground to divide which provided an opportunity for the landlord's men to manipulate the weights. Thus, the demand of common threshing ground for the crop share division was central to the Tebhaga movement[8]. Examination of the slogans of this movement, which were popularised through organised village meetings documented by Majumdar and others, highlights the issues central to this struggle; demand for a common threshing ground for the division of crop share, two-third share of the produce instead of half, no interest on loaned paddy and no illegal exaction of various kind[9]. Access to land and its produce was central to the movement.

The organisation of the Tebhaga movement was facilitated by the communist party of India (CPI) and its associate left organisations. Sunil Sen[10] described memories of his own engagement in the movement as a village organiser when urban middle class party members went to their villages and organised village committees for the sharecroppers. These village committees acted as the main force of the movement at the local level

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[6] Colebrooke, 1866. p. 148
[7] Majumdar, 1993
[8] Majumdar, 1993
[9] Among others See Majumdar, 1993; Das, 2002, Ray, 2000 (in Bengali)
[10] Sen, 1972

where the provincial leaders gave a coordinated and organisational form of the movement. Through the facilitation of communist party activism, a group of village leaders emerged from the actual sharecroppers group who led the confrontation[11]. The Tebhaga movement in this sense is not something entirely rooted to locality. There is an interesting similarity to note between the organisation of the Tebhaga movement and present day mining resistance, which is the presence of village committees at the local level and the facilitation role by left orientated groups. The role of these village committees and left groups in the present scenario demands closer attention.

Many discussions of the Tebhaga movement in Dinajpur derive from left orientated historians and writers and are based on their memories of the involvement of the communist party in the movement[12]. Often, these writers draw on the presence of general 'communist' consciousness in this movement. Ranajit Guha[13] argues that historiography has considered the sharecropper's 'consciousnesses' as arising naturally from their class position. He argues that these writings have limited the 'consciousnesses' by making the cultivators and sharecroppers as an empirical person only. Sharecroppers' revolts are seen here as natural phenomena and described with rhetoric: "they break out like thunderstorm, heave like earthquakes, speak like wildfires, infect like epidemic[14]." He notes that historiography tends to attribute sharecropper uprisings to a number of key causes that are somehow external. By doing so, it denies any claims of sharecroppers' own consciousness[15].

According to Guha, these writings are made up of three kinds of discourse, which can be categorised as 'primary, secondary and tertiary' based on their 'appearance in time and their filiations'. These categories are different from each other by the 'degree of its formal and/or acknowledged (as opposed to real and/or tacit) identification with an official point of view, by the measure of its distance from the event to which it refers, and by the ratio of the distributive and integrative components in its narrative'[16]. In these writings 'rural uprising' is expressed in a way that finds general solidarity

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[11] Majumdar, 1993
[12] For example, Sen, 1972; Ghosh and Suniti, 2001; Das, 2002; Ray , 2000
[13] Guha, 1996. p. 2
[14] Guha, 1996. p. 3
[15] Guha, 1996. p. 38
[16] Guha, 1996. p. 3

emerging from a larger political goal and fails to see the local and territorial particularities[17].

Guha analyses three discourses to demonstrate how 'particular blind spots' are maintained in historical writings. The primary discourse is official in nature in the sense that it is originated mainly for administrative use or for reasons of state by the bureaucrats and others employed by the government. The same trend is followed by the non-official local writers who are 'symbiotically' attached to state authority such as missionaries, landlords, and moneylenders and so on. The discourse is official because its generation and distribution is primarily for government decision making on issues related to state administration and action. These writings include statements from the insurgents or their allies only as a part of administrative concern, often as 'enclosures', as is done in direct reporting or letters from field employees. Secondary discourse interprets these events and uses an 'open up perspective' to make it history.

According to Guha, this turns an event or 'primary source' into something processed or a product that we generally recognise as history. This kind of discourse is characterised by two kinds of writings, the first being memories or reflections on the experience by the participants without acknowledging their own attachment to state interests; the second as representations that came from administrators related to a particular event. Guha concludes the discursive character of these writings, in many ways, is contaminated by bias, judgment and opinion. This form of historiography is rooted in a specific kind of knowledge which serves to maintain state authority.

Tertiary discourse, on the other hand, is likely to take the insurgent's perspective, particularly in the case of the 'left' group. These writings are not entirely rooted in time and memories of events and are likely to take a third person view. Tertiary discourse relies on causes as an explanatory tool to reveal the larger political interests. Guha presents examples of Ray's writings again where the mobile indigenous labour force is described to have indicated the struggle of 'Indian people in general and peasants and workers in particular against foreign and local oppressor'[18]. Historians in this tradition are not interested in exploring the consciousness attached to a particular struggle. This means, as Guha puts it, 'denying a will to the mass of the rebels themselves and

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[17] Guha, 1996. p. 39
[18] Guha, 1996. p. 67

representing them merely as instrument of some other will'[19] and producing an ahistorical history of insurgency that deny the contradictions.

Subaltern scholar Ranajit Guha's analysis points to the importance of a more anthropological emphasis on locality. But it's not that anthropology is/should be about the search of local politics only. It is, rather, the particularity of a movement that needs to be explored. Irfan Habib[20] criticises subaltern scholars for denying external influence on any movement and assuming that the external source of ideas could only be the 'bourgeois elites' and not any other group. Their view isolates a struggle to its very own context which could never themselves dictate a unified national movement. Local struggle in this sense is never a part of a national movement and always and only forms a part of its context. They only stress the ability of autonomous actions of a particular group. Any 'mystical belief in the virtue of an externally untainted movement of any segment of the non-elites' is not helpful for exploring the possible networks between different interest groups in a particular movement[21]. However, this is not to subscribe back to radical historiography where Irfan Habib belongs. Rather, an approach that seeks both the contextuality of a particular movement and its possible ability to 'connect' to other ideas or groups is important to understand the nature of the movement. In this research I attempt to look both ways.

2. The Collective Images of a 'Foreign Company'

The history of Bengal is inseparable from the British East India Company's affairs in India. The company was originally formed as an English joint-stock company for pursuing trade with the East Indies in the 1600s under the name Governor and Company of Merchants of London Trading into the East Indies[22]. After a merger with a rival English company that challenged its business monopoly, it was renamed the United Company of Merchants of England trading to the East Indies in 1708, by which time the Indian subcontinent had become the main interest of the company[23].

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[19] Guha, 1996. p. 364
[20] Habib, 1986. p. 32
[21] Habib, 1986. p. 33
[22] Farrington, 2002
[23] Chaudhuri, 1965

In Bengal, the first factory of the company was established in 1633 to trade cotton, silk and spices[24]. Though early presence of the company in Bengal was characterised by conflicts with other similar European companies, mainly Portuguese and Dutch, it secured business successes by managing tax and other concessions from the State. The Company was allowed to anchor ships wherever they wanted, build factories and warehouse where needed, and buy and sell freely without taking advance permission[25].

By the late seventeenth century provincial rebellions against the Mughal Empire spread to different parts of India, including Bengal, and weakened the central control of the empire[26]. At the end of the seventeenth century the Indian Muslim Empire, also known as the Mughal Empire, faced a rebellion from a local landlord who, with his own army, captured and held areas of Bengal for sometime[27]. Competition to capture central and provincial power also broke out. It was within this background that the East India Company started to strengthen military measures, such as building forts, in different parts of India[28]. Emerging rebellions in Bengal and elsewhere on the Indian-subcontinent forced the rulers to agree with the British East Indian Company's demand of establishing military forts to protect business interests[29]. Change in the regional administration of the monarch, as a result of increased rebellion, created tensions with the Company, as new provincial rulers did not feel the need to regard concessions provided by their predecessors[30]. The combination of these factors, such as the increased military capacity of the company, changes in regional military and administration posts, and increased regional rebellion, resulted in the East India Company transforming from a trade entity into a trade and military entity[31].

Marshall[32] noted that by 1765 the East India Company and private English traders spread their business ventures deep into the eastern provinces[33], which brought conflict

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[24] Bhattacharya, 1954. p. 18.

[25] Bruce, 1810 cited in Bhattacharya, 1954. pp. 463-64

[26] Bruce, Annals. Vol.1. pp. 556-58

[27] Riyazu-s-Salatin. Translated by Abdus Salam. Cited in Bhattacharya, 1954. p. 9

[28] Bruce, Annals. Vol.1 pp. 560-61

[29] Bhattacharya, 1954. p. 10

[30] Bhattacharya (1954) notes that the new ruler of Bengal in 1657 introduced a period of uncertainty for the company as he did not regard the promise of concessions provided by his predecessor as "binding on them". p. 22

[31] Wilson, Early Annals. Vol.1. p.79 in Sinha, 1967

[32] Marshall, 1987

[33] The present Indian states of Bengal, West Bengal together with present-day Bangladesh, Bihar and Orissa together with present-day Bangladesh formed, under a single governor, the eastern part of the Mughal Empire. Islam, 1979

with government interests. The government experienced conflicts around issues such as the commercial infiltration of individual British traders into areas where they were not officially granted permission to trade. In 1757 the Company fought, and won, a war against the new ruler of the province who denied the continuation of tax concessions. With that, the Company had gained *de facto* control of the province without formal ruling authority. A new ruler of the province was positioned under certain conditions stipulated by the Company, such as the continuation of tax concessions and liberty for the Company to spread businesses into new areas. Local officials and forces of the new ruler often made the English private traders stop their businesses in the new areas. The East India Company provided support to private British traders, which led to another war with government forces in 1765. This resulted in the formal transfer of authority over the provinces of Bengal, Bihar, and Orissa, to the Company, thereby establishing British rule over the region. This historical moment can be recognised as the dividing line between the Muslim period and the periods of British rule in Bengal[34].

Taxation on land was the largest source of revenue collected by the Company for maintaining military and business ventures[35]. To improve management of the land and tax system, the Company developed a new land revenue system in 1776. This system was based on a simple principle of contracting land proprietorships out to middlemen, usually Zamindars, in exchange for revenue at a level fixed in perpetuity. If the Zamindars failed to pay the revenue within the time limit fixed by the Company, the land would be transferred to a new owner under the same conditions. As such, the rule was that as long as revenue was paid punctually, proprietorship of land was secured[36]. The new system brought changes to traditional land relations in Bengal and proved oppressive for the cultivators of the land. Some underlining characteristics of this new system, and its implications on the cultivators of Bengal, led to the cultivator's and sharecroppers' insurgency, as discussed later in the chapter.

The story of the East India Company in the Indian subcontinent, particularly in Bengal, as discussed by Nick Robins, is configured with a profound moral, "that foreign companies want not just trade, but power"[37]. Every child in Bengal knows the story of how, defeating the ruler of Bengal, the company took control of the province in 1857;

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[34] Marshall, 1987
[35] Chaudhiri, 1970. p. 828
[36] Marshall, 1987
[37] Robins, 2006. p.13

Gurcharan Das writes, "it is not surprising that we are suspicious of foreign companies"[38]. Robins[39] discusses how the company's business policy contributed to the formation of such collective images of the company. The textile industry of Bengal is one example that was affected by the company's trade. The company's policy prevented Bengal weavers to sell their cloths to private merchants and forced them to sell to the company's agents (gamastas) at whatever price offered. Upon taking control of Bengal, the company used the existing military and administrative establishments to control the market in order to force "the manufacturers to work for them and to work at an under price" and to establish a monopoly in the textile business[40]. This, as Robins notes, resulted in the weavers becoming unable to earn enough money to pay back the advances taken from the company, causing them to fall into debt and poverty. Hameeda Hossain, a Bangladeshi writer, recorded this history; "the corporate buyer, who had provided the weaver with his working capital and access to the market [that] became the root cause of [weaver's] pauperisation"[41]. The Corporate policies shape the popular memories of the foreign corporation, the East India Company, in Bengal as poet Shahid Ali expresses, "the looms of Bengal silenced; and the cotton shipped raw; by the British to England"[42].

Robins refers to the monopoly of the textile trade and the control over the land revenue system as the 'unrequited trade' that brought resistance from the people affected[43]. He pointed out that the company's policy for textile business faced resistance from the Bengal weavers in 1767 when a group of weavers sent their representatives to the company office in Calcutta requesting an increase in the price of cloth. As mentioned earlier, the land revenues systems in Bengal attracted an armed uprising from the cultivators and the sharecroppers.

This can be seen as analogous with Stuart Kirsch's[44] analysis, though in a different time and context, of how the people affected by a mining corporation in south-central New Guinea found the corporation guilty of 'unrequited reciprocity', as it failed to meet its accountability for the impact of the mine. Kirsch shows how Yanggom People in New

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[38] Das, 2002
[39] Robins, 2006
[40] Robins, 2006. p.77
[41] Hossain, 1983. p. 13
[42] Quoted in Robins, 2006. p. 78
[43] Robins, 2006. p. 76
[44] Kirsch, 2006

Guinea mobilised their political struggle against the corporation, who they observed, did not fulfil its due responsibility toward the community where it operates. Shahid Ali's poetic expressions or Hameeda Hossain's analyses of the role of the foreign corporation, the East India Company, reveals the consequences of what was termed the 'unrequited trade' on the people of Bengal. The collective memory of the East India Company, as expressed in Gurcharan Das's note, places the role of a foreign corporation as conflicting with the 'local' interest. The image of foreign corporations as being against local interests continues to shape present day conflicts around the Asia Energy Corporation's mining project in Phulbari, and provides force for nationalism against the mine. Though, as the next chapter will reveal, the 'nationalist' ideas around the planned mine are not homogenous.

3. Transition to 'nationhood'

3.1 Towards a 'Muslim Community'?

The partition of the Bengal province by the British government in October 1905 was the first political development towards the creation of a separate political group for Bengal Muslims[45]. The partition was followed by the formation of the political party All India Muslim League (AML) in Dhaka in December of 1906. The British authorities facilitated the partition by declaring East Bengal a separate province, with Dhaka as its capital[46]. Sir Salimullah became the first party leader who expressed a desire for a separate province for Muslims. "There are many good things in store for us… and the Mohammedans (Muslims) being the largest in number in the new province, they will have the largest share.[47]" The leaders of the Muslim League propagated Muslim unity in defence of interests of the Bengal Muslims from Hindu landlords and professionals[48]. However, the new party did not represent any single community with a common aspiration. Matiur Rahman found people of various characters who came together under the banner of the Muslim League and characterised

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[45] Banerjee, 1925. p. 173, 186, 191; Grover, 1964. pp. 90-100
[46] For the evidence of government inspiration to form a party for the Indian Muslims, see Zakaria, 1970
[47] Salimullah, 1906 quoted in Broomfield, 1968. p. 45
[48] All India mobilism League session, Delhi, 30 December 1918 in Broomfield, 1968. p. 112

their aspirations into four categories, the Fundamentalists, the Radical Humanists, the Bengal protectionists, and an amorphous group of Muslim middle class youth[49].

Not everyone in East Bengal supported partition. The event was followed by anti-partition protests in both parts of Bengal, particularly by student cultural organisations and Hindu landlords who owned large properties in predominantly Muslim East Bengal[50]. The result was the annulment of the Bengal partition in 1911. After that, Eastern Bengal saw an emergence of a new generation of Muslim League leaders with a more liberal outlook[51]. A. K. Fazlul Huq was one of these and he stressed unity of the Hindu-majority west and the Muslim-majority east in his public speeches[52]. He became president of the All India Muslim League in 1916 where he served until 1921. His political stance was best expressed in a speech delivered at a party conference where he stated, "the relation between a landlord and his tenant, between a lawyer and his client are merely personal and individuals and are seldom affected by communal consideration. I do not think that the Muslim representatives of those sections of the society are more merciful to their respective victims"[53].

The next stage of politics in Eastern Bengal was influenced by elements of the communist revolution that was developing in Russia during that time. The Russian Revolution of 1917 was followed by communist political penetration in Bengal, as well as in India. The Communist party of India was born in 1921 with Muzaffar Ahmed of Eastern Bengal acting as a founding member. Just prior to that, the All India Trade Union Congress, a leftist worker's party, was formed in 1920[54]. It was at this time that peasant organisations started to form in Bengal. For example, land tenants and sharecroppers association was founded in 1920 with office bearers coming from both west and east Bengal[55]; the Calcutta Agricultural Association was formed in 1917 by Muslim league leader Fazlul Huq and a group of lawyers and journalists[56]. In 1929 the All Bengal Tenants' Association was formed with another Muslim league leader,

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[49] The Bengalee, 1904. Calcutta. January 15. p. 4
[50] Sen, 1977. p. 48
[51] See, Nevinson, 1908. p. 192
[52] Gandhi, 2000
[53] All India Muslim League session, Delhi, 30 December 1918 in Broomfield, 1968. p. 112.
[54] Imam, 1966. pp. 74-97
[55] Broomfield, 1968. p. 157
[56] Broomfield, 1968. p. 157

Abdur Rahim, as its first president[57]. The tendency of the new generation of Muslim league leaders in Bengal to become involved in issues of land cultivators was evident. These parties stressed the rights of land tenants and cultivators to the land. They campaigned for revision of the existing land act in order to bring cultivators ownership of the land they cultivated. The land act implemented by the British government, the Permanent Settlement Act, did not ensure ownership rights of the land tenants[58]. Though revolution was not the aim of these parties, their socialist motivations were expressed by certain political agendas. They campaigned for the abolition of landlord authority over land revenue collection and for cultivator's ownership rights[59].

The sharecropper's insurgency proliferated in the 1940s and was facilitated by communist party activists who acted on similar agendas[60]. Although the leaders of these parties never associated themselves with communist parties, central leaders of the Muslim league disliked their involvement in peasants' issues. Muhammad Ali Jinnah, who took over party leadership in 1934, made the accusation that "all the talk of hunger and poverty is intended to lead the people towards socialistic and communistic ideas."[61]. In a speech delivered after taking over the party leadership, he asked the Muslims of India to join the Muslim League and build a community based on Muslim solidarity[62]. Huq, on the other hand, appealed for Muslim unity in Bengal for different reasons. In a public meeting in 1936, he said, "…my fight is with landlords, capitalists…The landlords are ninety five percent Hindus. And capitalists are about ninety eight percent. I apprehend that they will soon join their Muslim compatriots, viz. Muslim landlords…there is no difference between the poor Hindus and poor Muslims as their interests are welded into one another"[63]. A blend of socialist ideas and inspirations for Muslim communal unity can be gathered from his statements; it is this blend that characterised the politics of Eastern Bengal in the first half of the twentieth century. One example of this can be found in the result of the Bengal provincial

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[57] Karim cited in Sen, 1987. pp. 7-8
[58] More discussion on the land relations under permanent settlement act is presented in the first section.
[59] Presidential address of Jinnah in the all India Muslim League conference in October 1937 at Lucknow quoted in Smith, 1945. p. 145
[60] History and character of peasant insurgency is presented in the first section
[61] Quoted in Smith, 1945. p. 145
[62] In Smith, 1945
[63] Amrit Bazar Patrica (Amrit Bazar Newspaper), Calcutta 11 September 1936 quoted in Sen, 1987. p. 80

election held in 1937 where the Muslim League won 60, and Huq's Peasant Tenant Party, the Krishok Praja Party, 54, electoral seats[64].

Examples of the varying inspirations contained in the image of a desired 'Muslim community' can also be found in the scholarly arenas of East-Bengal. The Muslim Literature Society, founded in Dhaka in 1926 by teachers and students of colleges and universities, aimed to foster the Bengali-Muslim literati[65]. Kazi Abdul Wadud, a member of the society, wrote, "…since the majority of the scholarly institutions were based in Calcutta the residents of Dhaka (the majority of who were Muslims) were lagging behind in fostering their intellectual capacities." He added that, "the Muslim Literary Society would increase the Muslim's contribution to the body of Bengal literature"[66]. The society, however, took on projects that could be viewed as the re-reading of Muslim society and culture through secular eyes. Shikha, the society's monthly journal, published writings of Bengali Muslim scholars who often stressed the need for a shift from a religious to a humanistic approach. Qazi Motahar Hossain, a Dhaka University Teacher, wrote, "…let me do my part. God will not fail to do his! Instead of spending a lot of time arguing about God and his attributes it is better to mind the little things that press urgently for attention"[67]. In an appeal for a prejudice-free society Abul Hossain, a writer, often stated, "Man can attain the quality of Allah"[68]. Hossain, at the same time, desired a 'Muslim Society'. He wrote, "Although I do not appreciate the present state of affairs in the Muslim society, I rather feel fortunate that I get ample opportunity to do something for a wretched society. All great men of the world were born in the wretched society. Let their memories guide our vision"[69]. Kazi Nazrul Islam, who was later named a national poet of Independent Bangladesh, created a genre for Islamic spiritual songs and poems in modern Bengali literature. Muslim Ummah, Muslim solidarity, had repeatedly taken a place in his vast collection of literary works. Islam, simultaneously, along with Bengal communist Mozaffar Ahmed, facilitated the publication of a number of popular journals and newspapers to circulate socialist ideas among peasants and workers. Langal, the Plough, the Ganabani, People's Voice, and Navayug, New Age, are the titles of Islam-

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[64] Ahmed, 1970. pp. 22-7
[65] Wadud, 1950
[66] Wadud, 1950. pp. 146-72
[67] Hossain, 1949. p. 46
[68] Hossain was quoted in Wadud, 1950. pp. 194-195
[69] Quoted in Fazal, 1961. pp. 93-98

edited publications circulated among the peasants and labourers in the 1920s[70]. Nazrul Islam and Abul Hossain's view of Muslim society was conditioned by other inspirational elements, a feature that characterised socio-political aspects of East-Bengal in the first half of twentieth century.

The Muslim League continued their propagation for a united Muslim 'community' in India, which officially turned to a demand for a separate nation for Muslims when the central party leader Jinnah expressed the need for a Muslim polity at a party conference in Lahore in 1940; "The Hindus and Muslims belong to two different religious philosophies, social customs and literatures…they belong to two different civilizations which are based mainly on conflicting ideas and conceptions[71]." The conference passed a resolution, known as the Pakistan Resolution, with the demand for independent states in the Muslim majority areas of northeast and northwest India[72]. After 1940, the Muslim League strengthened its party activities by creating its district and village level committees in Muslim Majority East-Bengal and other Muslim majority areas in the northeast and northwest of India[73]. Prior to Indian independence in 1947 the demand for a separate Muslim state was supported by interest groups for various reasons. 'Muslim officers…expected to get speedier promotions in the new state in absence of competition with Hindu officers; The Muslim traders and industrialists…backed the demand for a separate state for similar reasons of achieving less competitive business environments[74]. For peasants a new Muslim state meant liberation from the Zamindar's authority over the land, the majority of whom where Hindus [75]. In this background Pakistan emerged as a nation in 1947 when the British withdrew their administrative authority from India. The Muslim majority of the eastern part of Bengal province, under the new administrative name of East Pakistan, came under the new state of Pakistan while the western part remained with independent India.

3.2 From 'Muslim community' to 'Bengali community'

The Pakistan-period of political history in Bangladesh is characterised by divisions and oppositions between the Eastern and Western parts. Within two years of the creation of

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[70] See Muzaffar Ahmed, Samakaler Katha (Contemporary tales) cited in Sen, 1987
[71] Islam, 1981. p. 4
[72] Westergaard, 1985. p. 27
[73] For discussion on political organization of the Muslim in Bengal see Talbot, 1988.
[74] Ahmed, 1975. p. 58
[75] Ahmed, 1975. p. 42

the Pakistan state its major political party, the Muslim League, broke down and a group of Bengali Muslim League leaders formed a new party, the East Pakistan Awami Muslim League (EPAML) in 1949. The new party consisted of youth leaders, including Sheikh Mujibur Rahman who would later lead the war for the independence of Bangladesh in 1971. The breakdown of the Muslim League followed growing discontentment among Bengali leaders regarding the government's differential budget allocation between two parts of Pakistan. According to the Pakistani Government's expenditure on education during that period, as presented by MS Jilani, East Pakistan was allocated 28.9% of the total budget for over half (55.4%) of the total population that lived in that part[76]. Dissatisfaction was also growing amongst Bengali Muslim League leaders as a result of the appointment of a growing number of non-Bengali leaders in the East-Pakistan Muslim League[77], as was noted by one of the party leaders in the Pakistani parliament, "…a feeling is growing among the east Pakistanis that eastern Pakistan is being neglected and treated merely as 'colony' of West Paksitan"[78]. The agenda of the new party moved away from the focus of Muslim brotherhood to one of territorial autonomy and the socio-economic development of poor peasants and workers. Some of the points the party made in its inaugural meetings included: "1) Pakistan should be a federal state whose units will enjoy full autonomous status. Only defence, foreign affairs and currency should be the concern of the central government; 2) Recognition of Bengali as one of the State languages of Pakistan; 3) Abolition of Zamindary system (hereditary landlords authority over the land) without compensation; 4) Nationalization of jute industries; 5) Ensure civil rights and liberties"[79]. As expressed in the above points, the socialist tradition of the nationalization of industries, secular languages of civil rights and liberties, peasant's issues of land relation, and a stress on Bengali identity featured in the programme of the new party.

The programme of the East-Pakistan Awami Muslim League (EPAML) reached a new level when it organised a mass protest against the Pakistani government's decision of making 'Urdu' the state language in 1948[80]. The protests, known as the Bengali Language Movement, presented a platform where the EPAML and communist party of

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[76] Jilani, 1964. p. 90
[77] Sen, 1977. p. 100
[78] Constituent Assembly of Pakistan Debates. 1948. Vol. 2 (1). pp. 6-7
[79] For 12 point programme taken in the first meeting of EPAML, see Statesman, 26 June 1949. Calcutta
[80] Maniruzzaman. 1973. p. 228

East Pakistan could work together[81]. Collaboration between left-oriented parties and non-communist parties was a feature of the movement. An action committee was formed in March 1948 that included representatives from the student wing of EPAML and the Student Federation, a pro-communist student organisation[82]. The committee also included representatives from a student organisation called Tamaddun Majlish (TM) that was formed by the non-communist Muslim students of Dhaka University[83]. A national convention was held in November 1950 in Dhaka under the joint initiative of the EPAML and the communist party and a protest was launched demanding the Bengali be made one the state languages. Soon, other demands, such as adequate share in the allocation of economic resources for East Bengal, were added to the movement. When the decision to make Urdu the only state language was withdrawn the movement moved on to other demands, such as equal numbers of appointments for Bengali people in bureaucratic positions. The movement became widespread and the EPAML gave way for non-Muslim Bengalis to become members of the party by dropping the word 'Muslim' and renaming the party the Awami League.

The Awami League soon became a popular political party in Eastern Pakistan as was evidenced when they secured an absolute majority in the national election of 1969. Demands for regional autonomy and interests, and the quest for the Bengali language turned into a call for independence shortly after the Pakistani government disregarded the election results. The Liberation War in 1971 was organised and led by the Awami League, a party which moved away from the Muslim League's manifesto of Muslim 'community' to one of the Bengali nationalism, with the influence of certain social traditions as expressed in its party programme. Stronger examples of the influence of socialism came out towards the end of the Pakistan period when the founding chief of the East Pakistan Muslim League, Maulana Bhasani, formed his own party under the idea of 'Islamic Socialism'. Bhasani, who was educated in Islamic theology, declared his party position in 1970 and stated that he wanted to establish "socialism through peaceful revolution by peasants, workers and intelligentsia; and with God and Islam as guiding force"[84].

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[81] Mukherjee, 1969. p. 48
[82] Mukherjee, 1969. pp. 40-42
[83] Umar, 1989. pp. 1-19
[84] Quoted in 'The Morning News' newspaper. 21 May 1970. In Sen, 1977. p. 357

Intellectuals of East Pakistan took the Language Movement, which later turned into a war of Independence, as their agenda. They formed the All Parties National Language Action Committee in 1952, which was made up of intellectuals, students and political leaders. Kazi Motahar Hossain, a Dhaka University teacher and writer, was made head of the committee[85]. Groups of Hossain's students toured different corners of East Pakistan to spread the ideas of the movement among the peasants[86]. The influence of the Language Movement by these Bengal literati can also be found in the increased popularity of Bengali courses at Dhaka University during the 1950s, as the University recorded a higher number of entrants for Bengali courses during that period[87]. As discussed earlier, Eastern Pakistani intellectuals desired a 'society' that accommodated other inspirational elements within Muslim society. Inspirations were sometimes expressed as 'secular' interpretations of Islam in scholarly work, sometimes urged for a Bengali identity, and sometimes as an inclination towards socialist ideas. Independent Bangladesh emerged in 1971 within this socio-political context.

3.3 'Fragments' of nationalism

The history above tells us about the various elements that influenced the creation and growth of a national identity. It is in this context that we can consider historical and present day aspects of nationalism in Bangladesh.

The urge for a Bangladeshi identity existed well before the demand for an independent country. It was there even when the main nationalist demand was for a separate country for Muslims. Pakistan came into existence based on the general demand for an independent and separate Muslim country where Islam would be the key cultural identity for the nation. Generally this was not opposed by anyone in either part of Pakistan both before and after 1947. The affiliation to Islam as a main national identity is generally still not disputed. However, even within an 'imagined' Muslim nation, then East-Pakistan, now Bangladesh, had different ways of practicing Islamic principles in their cultural life which did not submit to the idea of the Islamic state of the Pakistan nation. Certain daily life practices, such as the way the marriage ceremony was

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[85] Maniruzzaman, 1975. p. 229
[86] Gankovsky and Gordon-Polonskaya, 1958. p.153
[87] Bengali department attracted 1028 graduates among total 4466 graduates of eleven arts department at the University during the period 1963-68. From, "Supplies of educated manpower in East Pakistan (Students)", 1971. Institute of Education and Research. University of Dhaka. pp. 80-82

conducted, the way girls dressed, the way the Bengali New Year was observed in East-Pakistan, were considered as Hindu culture by the unofficial propaganda machineries of the nation, such as newspapers (newspaper would be an element of Anderson's 'print capitalism'). Wearing dots on the forehead as part of a girl's make-up, observing Bengali New Year, applying bridal facial makeup in a certain way, and even wearing the 'Sari', were all viewed as elements of 'Hindu' culture heritage in West Pakistan. Of course replicating so-called 'Hindu' culture was not what people desired for their Pakistan nation. While an Islamic brotherhood was a desired national identity, certain elements of their internal social life retained their own version of national identity.

There is a general belief that the Bengali language movement set the tone for the demand for an independent Bangladesh. However, the urge for a Bengali linguistic identity existed well before the separatist sentiment emerged. This was equally true for the leaders and proponents of a Pakistan nation. Chatterjee[88] provides an example of how the Bengali language was considered an 'inner' aspect of national identity in colonial Bengal, just as was the development of a Bangladeshi identity. Pakistan started to develop a nation-wide, or national, language well before it formally declared Urdu as a state language in 1957. The state and its machineries considered that Urdu should be the standardized and only language for the bureaucracy and other state functionaries. The practice of Urdu as an official language did not require any official declaration; it was brought about through government institutions and bureaucracy in the politically dominant West Pakistan, but the extent of the practice of Urdu was limited to the level of official communication. While the state's idea of Pakistan and Urdu as the national language was congruent, this was not the case in East-Bengal. The Bengali language was so much part of their own 'inner' culture that they were not ready to give up Bengali for the sake of the nation, even though that 'nation' was generally desired. An example of this is one of the student leaders who formally protested against the declaration of Urdu as a state language while simultaneously being a strong advocate of the Pakistan nation; he would later become the top leader of the Islamic political party Jamaat-e-Islami. Meanwhile politicians, intellectuals, and the full set of literary bodies alike took on the cultural and political project of making Bengali their own official and cultural language. Elements of 'print capitalism' were set up to preserve and promote Bengali literary practices. Initiatives such as the weekly publication Ittefaq, a Bengali

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[88] Chatterjee, 1993

print newspaper came into existence before the anti-Pakistan movement emerged. Urdu was not allowed to intervene in the realms of Bengali language culture. Bengali nationalism was already 'sovereign' within the broader structure of the Pakistan nation. It may be 'imagined' in Anderson's sense but the internal 'cleavages' put this imagination into constant revision[89]. Alternate discourses can exist 'parallel to state-sponsored ideas of national belonging' or in tension with them depending on the specific situation[90].

In the next chapter, a closer look at the specific situation of the ongoing movement against the mine will reveal how the ideas of 'nationalism' are worked out within particularities of the movement. To present a clearer background of the movement, the following discussion will focus on the political conditions and practices in Independent Bangladesh.

4. The Making of Bangladesh

The context in which the liberation war took place suggests a 'secular' and 'socialist' nature of the nationalist movement. The post-independent government, led by Awami League Chief Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, showed its initial commitment to its pre-independent 'socialist' inspirations. The constitution of the new country, adopted in December 1972, expressed this early commitment as it determined that basic needs of food, clothing, shelter, education, health care and social security would be the responsibility of the state[91]. In addition, it stated that 'a socialist economic system' would be the policy of the government where the state would ensure a just, egalitarian society, and the 'peoples' control over the means of production[92]. Policies were taken for the redistribution of land among the landless through land reforms[93]. Nationalization of industries was enforced by the policies of the new government.

4.1 Shift towards new economic policies

Much of these agendas, however, remained unrealised. After 1971, the policy for redistributive land reform was modified and large inefficient holdings became

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[89] Chatterjee, 1993
[90] Itzigsohn, 2006. p. 103
[91] Maniruzzaman, 1980. p .155. See also Sobhan and Ahmed, 1981
[92] Khan and Haque, 1996. p. 206
[93] Khan et al, 1996

'efficient' farms through the stressed use of modern agricultural technology[94]. Increased production from big landholdings for growth and development had replaced the early policy of land re-distribution. Whatever land distribution had taken place in the form of allocating government owned land, Khas land, to the landless, failed to decrease asset inequalities[95]. Much of the nationalized industries were affected by corrupt management related to the nepotistic government party and were incurring losses, so the system proved unsustainable[96]. Within three years of independence the country faced a famine that started in the summer of 1974 when rice prices rose sharply due to crop failures as a result of heavy floods in certain parts. Widespread starvation, particularly in Northern Bangladesh, forced many rural poor to migrate to Dhaka in search of work. The situation eased only when winter crops arrived along with foreign aid in November 1974.

The policies that followed the 1974 famine were influenced by international aid agencies. In exchange for the promise of aid, the Sheikh Mujibur government, in the last year of its tenure, agreed to curb public sector investment and raise the ceilings for private investment during the years 1974-75[97]. This is not to suggest that the change in policy was a straightforward capitulation to the power of aid. As stated by a member of the planning commission, during a discussion regarding the devaluation of currency at the time, this had "been under discussion for some time…it would be misleading to see this largely as a result of [World] Bank pressure. It, however, seems to have helped to tilt the balance in an ongoing domestic debate"[98]. This reversal from the early nationalisation policies to one of private ventures, however, became a permanent feature in the policies of later governments in Bangladesh. The year 1975 saw a series of coups and counter-coups, and the intervention of leftist military groups during the process of the change of state power from Sheikh Mujibur Rahman to General Ziaur Rahman. Ziaur Rahman was placed in power with support from a joint leftist-soldier group after Sheikh Mujibur was killed by another military group. General Ziaur Rahman, however, was not willing to accept the socialist aims of the leftist group that had given him the support to come into power within the chaos of the coup and counter-coup in 1975. Ziaur Rahman's anti-left position and his military measures to

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[94] Khan, 1996
[95] Jannuzi, and Peach, 1980
[96] Hossain, 1996a; Hossain, 1996b
[97] Sobhan, 1982
[98] Sobhan, 1990. p. 191

control the leftist group resulted in the fragmentation and dwindling of left parties[99]. Ziaur Rahman's government further aligned the policies of Bangladesh with the suggestions of international development institutions, such as the World Bank. In 1975 a revised industrial policy was approved which pressed for the implementation of the de-nationalisation of state-owned enterprises, private industry and investment promotion as advised by the World Bank. The constitution of Bangladesh was also amended in 1977 to move away from the previous government's experiments with 'socialist' agendas and the word 'socialism' was replaced by 'economic and social justice', and 'secularism' with 'absolute trust and faith in the Almighty Allah'[100].

The intended shift towards private investment and market-oriented policy was backed up by civil bureaucratic arrangements. Organising a pool of trained officers and administrators for the promotion of 'liberalisation' and setting up institutional mechanisms to create new civil bureaucrats was one of the agendas of Ziaur's government. As part of this agenda a number of top ranking former civil servants, who were disfavoured by Mujibur for their loyalty to the Pakistani Government, were brought back to service by Ziaur[101]. These officers 'were the lineal descendants of the civil service of Pakistan, with all the values and orientations implied' who provided the government institutions with policy and management services for the development of a private-sector based economy[102]. These efforts were accompanied by political initiatives to make the Ziaur's reign legitimised and popular. After a spell of economic crises and famine during Mujibur's period, it was possible for Ziaur to create expectations for a better economy by means of new initiatives; a familiar scenario of economic reform to efforts elsewhere[103]. Rural population were informed about the new initiatives offered by the government through the promotion of the 'green revolution' by supplying irrigation machines to rural buyers (i.e. owners of medium and large landholdings) and appointing pesticide dealers in the villages. Peasants were connected to the agri-technology market created through increased production. To connect to the peasantry, Ziaur himself travelled throughout the country to promote high-yielding rice varieties and agricultural initiatives, such as building dams for irrigation. He gathered international support by resuming the multi-party system after

[99] Lifschultz, 1979; Also, Maniruzzaman, 1980
[100] Maniruzzaman, 1980. p. 215; Also, Ahamed, 1978. pp. 1168-80
[101] Islam, 1986; Franda, 1982
[102] Maniruzzaman, 1980. p. 210
[103] Franda, 1982; Geddes, 1995

forming his own political party, the Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP), which is one of two major political parties in present Bangladesh.

The outlook of the new party was different from Mujibur's Awami League as the BNP included professionals with little or no experience of party politics, such as lawyers, in its founding committee. Unlike the Awami League, the party was free of any left-inspired groups and central leaders, and without their predisposed political stance, was directed towards economic reform. The BNP, in its first tenure, was motivated to legitimise its power by mobilising peoples' support through bringing economic stability in order to avoid repetition of the 1974 famine. Ziaur's reform activities were expressed as alternatives to, as Mujibur termed, 'national socialism'. Having taking power during the post-famine years, the reforms were intended to be a workable solution offered by 'a new regime taking office after acute economic crisis'[104]. Though there were no large-scale reforms, policy changes and bureaucratic set-ups in favour of privatisation and investment helped attract aid and development agencies to Bangladesh[105].

This new direction in economic policy continued during the period of General Ershad who took power in 1982 establishing a quasi-military government following the assassination of Ziaur Rahamn by a group within the military in 1981. Ershad's government enacted the National Industrial Policy, with the encouragement of foreign and private investment as the key element. By the end of Ershad's nine-year rule the 'liberal' market policy was resolutely established without any apparent threat of reversal. "People (had) come to believe that a drastic reversal of the privatisation program was neither possible nor desirable"[106]. Ershad, however, faced strong opposition from the Awami League (AL) - BNP coalition throughout his entire tenure. A large part of his occupancy in state power was spent within the context of martial law, as the state constitution was made inactive in favour of martial law. Political and media activities were restricted. Then, in an effort to be part of party politics, he formed his own party, the Jatiya Party (JP), which did not have enough time to spread at the rural level as a result of the ban on party politics for a large part of his tenure. After a failed attempt to make a coalition with AL and BNP, Ershad finally resigned in 1990 in the face of mass protests that the AL-BNP coalition mobilised in collaboration with

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[104] Franda, 1992. p. 54
[105] Humphrey, 1990; Kochanek, 1993
[106] Humphrey, 1990. p. 90

other small left, and a few pro-Islamic, parties. Bangladesh returned to a multi-party democracy with the election in 1991 when BNP won the election with AL and their allies as the main opposition, and vice versa for the subsequent tenures.

In their policies both the BNP and AL continued to promote private enterprise and foreign investment and succeeded in efforts to speed up the process[107] by taking new initiatives, such as establishing special economic zones with tax incentive facilities. Weakened and fragmented left parties were in no position to take up any organised anti-liberalisation political movement so some of them decided to form coalition governments with the AL. With the AL being relatively more accommodative to leftist parties they decided to continue the coalition that had been built during the pre-independence movements and anti-Ershad protests, and signed up to liberal economic agendas to accept the inevitable. The BNP, on the other hand, built alliances with some pro-Islamic parties for a stronger political position. The left political parties, however, gathered themselves under the banner of a 'nationalist' citizen forum[108] as larger foreign investments started to be attracted to the country's natural resource sector. It was this forum that mobilized a movement against a global mining company aspiring to establish a coal mine in Phulbari in northern Bangladesh; the 'site' where this research was based. The nature and implication of this forum is discussed in Chapter Seven.

4.2 Discourse of antagonism

Since the resumption of parliamentary democracy in 1991 the field of party politics in Bangladesh has shown some patterns and traits. Politics revolve around two major political parties, the AL and BNP, and each of these parties lead an alliance of smaller parties that succumb to the agendas of the lead parties. The AL alliance is labelled as 'secular' for its commitment to reverse a clause of the Bangladesh constitution from 'absolute trust and faith in the Almighty Allah' to 'secularism', as well as for its collaboration with some left parties and its recent refusal to form a coalition with pro-Islamic parties, such as Jamat-e-Islami, that stand against their agenda of a constitutional amendment. The BNP alliance firmly opposes the proposal of omitting the word 'faith in the Almighty Allah' from the constitution as it symbolises the

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[107] Baxter, 1998
[108] The forum is called "The National Committee to Protect Oil Gas Mineral Rouses Power and Ports" or "The National Committee (NC)"

Muslim country. The conflicting relation between these two parties spans across other areas of political concern, creating an 'enemy discourse' in the politics of Bangladesh[109].

The antagonism has developed historically throughout periods of conflict. AL organised the liberation war of Bangladesh, and its leader, Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, led the nationalist movement during the pre-independence periods leading to the war of Independence. This is why this party claims to be the champion of nationalism, sovereignty and other signifiers associated with Bengali identity. The AL's unchallenged legitimacy to power in an independent Bangladesh was disrupted by the emergence of BNP through its founder General Ziaur Rahman. Also a freedom fighter, Rahman emerged as a political leader with initial aid of the military, by enforcing martial law and using military means to control chaotic political situations and opposition forces. On the contrary, BNP claims to be the 'saviour' of the people and the economy of Bangladesh, as they came into power after a period of famine created by the nepotistic and incompetent post-independent AL government. BNP presents itself as the saviour of democracy as it brought the country back to a multi-party system to negate Mujibur's socialist-type, like-minded, grand-alliance system that was implemented in the early 1970s by AL. The variable interpretations and numerous facets of these historical moments are used to legitimise and de-legitimise the respective party's moral authority to lead Bangladesh. Credit to sovereignty is continuously disputed and moral authority to lead is constantly contested. This creates a discourse where "the essentialising of the other persists…(and) its stereotyping of the other continues, changes and gains density" according to political situations in hand[110].

4.3 *Hartal* Politics

Resentment is expressed through means of political protests that have been patterned with a popular form called *Hartal.* It connotes a strike-like situation that involves a shutdown of offices and workspaces, shops, transport systems, businesses and educational institutions. Road blockages, forceful shutdown of shops and business centres, and marching through the streets are some familiar characteristics of present day Hartals in Bangladesh. Hartal is a popular practice employed by social and political

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[109] Islam, 2004. p. 9
[110] Islam, 2004. p. 10

groups, such as those protesting the mine, for expressing resentment and frustration. Though Hartals expect that people will voluntarily enforce a strike situation, they are often enforced primarily through forceful means, such as blockages and marches. Hartal does not necessarily imply voluntary public support for the strike.

During the Pakistan period, the Bengali language movement for Bengali to be declared a state language was enacted through widespread agitation as well as a series of general strikes held by political parties and student organisations, which eventually forced the government to fulfil the demand in 1952. The nature of Hartal imposed by the AL during the 1969 movement against the Pakistan military government, seemed to be followed by political agitation in independent Bangladesh. The string of Hartals in 1969 were observed by strikes, police action, police-activist street fights, and curfews[111] that compelled President Ayub Khan to invite the military to take control of the state. The more forceful nature of these Hartals and the military response from the Pakistani government led to the radicalisation of the movement to take it to the Liberation War. After independence, the BNP oriented itself with Hartal during the movement against Ershad's quasi-military government of the 1980s. The AL-BNP coalition was built for the purpose of the movement using Hartals as the main means of agitation, through which it became a familiar phenomenon in the political scenario of Bangladesh. Since then it has been used by opposition parties to press the government on particular issues or for the removal of the government. Hartals are a means to negate the legitimacy of the ruling party by mobilising politics, where response from police and courts towards the activists are seen as 'political capital' for the persecuted[112]. The senior party members of AL who were arrested by the last 'caretaker government'[113] were awarded with ministerial positions after the party won the election and members who allegedly collaborated with the caretaker government were suspended from their

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[111] Rashiduzzaman, 1997. p. 256

[112] Islam, 2004. p. 12

[113] The caretaker government is a system of interim government installed after the completion of the tenure of one government to oversee the transition from one government to another through holding national elections. The outgoing government hands over the power to the head of the caretaker government chosen beforehand by the president of the state. The head of the caretaker government (chief advisor) then forms an advisory board to oversee different ministries during the interim period. It is expected that the president would select the candidate for the head of the caretaker government in coordination with the ruling and opposition parties. The main objective of the caretaker government is to hold the national election in fair manner within ninety days without any political influence. The system have overseen three national elections with the tenure of the last one prolonged for about two years with military support when number of political leaders from two major parties were arrested on charges of corruption.

party positions by both the AL and BNP. Sufferings caused by political agitations are rewarded when the party attains the political victory.

Hartals are also used to express voices, mobilise public support and promote particular agendas. Non-party and locally sustained Hartals are common in agitation scenarios of Bangladesh. Local social and political groups have enforced a number of hartals over the past few years to force the government to turn their sub-districts administrative setups into ones that attract government jobs and the allocation of development funds. The relatively small Islamist group, the Islami Ain Bastobayon Committee (Islamic Law Implementation Committee), uses Hartals to protest the ruling party's 'women development policy' as the group observes the policy as being contradictory with the Islamic law of inheritance and women's property rights. Hartal is a means of agitation for various political and social groups who promote their own agendas and seek public attention by enforcing interruption to everyday life through activities such as road blockages and street marches. The rationale of a particular group's Hartal lies within the agenda they're seeking to promote to the general population.

4.4 'It's now all Bangladeshis'?

Bangladesh is imagined in the following saying – "We are now all Bangladeshis"[114]. Of course, Bangladeshis are not all the same and the following brief discussion explores the contradictions within this homogenous generalisation of the Bangladeshi people. Population information revealed by the government and other institutions expresses the existence of ethnic and linguistic similarities in Bangladesh. Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics census 1991 counts- 88.3 percent of the population was Muslim, 10.5 percent Hindu, .6 percent Buddhist, .3 percent Christian and .3 percent others[115]. Bengali is the 'ethnic' language for the entire population except the small percentage of Indigenous population.

Indeed, the result of the successful struggles to force out the 'other' people added to the credentials of the 'we are all Bangladeshi' expression. Foreign rulers, such as the

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[114] Though there is debate around which connotation- Bengali or Bangladeshi- best express the sovereignty and identity of the people of independent Bangladesh I use the term Bangladeshi to signify the citizens of Bangladesh. Use of Bangladeshi instead of Bengali or Bangalee was a political intervention, a neologism of Ziaur Rahman's rule to separate the identity of the people of Bangladesh from Bangalee label of the nationalist struggle and from Hindu Bengalis (Chowdhury et al, 1996).

[115] The Minority Rights Group International. Dhaka, 1997. p. 544

British and Hindu landlords during the anti-British movement, and the non-Bengali Muslims and West-Pakistani government during the Pakistan period, composed this 'other' category. In absence of the 'foreign' constituents, present Bangladeshi society stands on a perceived idea of ethnic and cultural similarities, forcing out the Hindus and other minority groups. In a statistics presented by a rights group called the Minority Rights Group International percentage of Hindu population was shown 16 percent of the total population. The group accused the government of deliberately undercounting the indigenous population of the country who were about one percent (1.3 million) of the total population[116].

The extent of the existence of caste and class elements has been a matter of debate. Though studies in Bangladesh generally rejected the existence of strict caste distinctions in Bangladeshi society remnants of caste-like divisions endure[117]. Although some early rural studies depicted a homogenous agrarian structure in Bangladesh, the majority of these early rural studies were conducted by the Bangladesh Academy for Rural Development (BARD) at Comilla, were carried out in this single district, and were mainly agro-economic surveys in nature[118]. These studies portrayed the agrarian structure through the generalisation of their survey results conducted in densely populated and fertile Comilla district[119]. More elaborate village studies of the 1970s challenged the assumptions of BARD studies and made efforts to reveal the 'emergent and entrenched class structures' within rural societies[120]. Reflecting on these studies Geoffrey Wood suggested that minor differences in asset ownership could translate into important elements of differential class power; and thus the existence of minor difference in asset ownership in rural Bangladesh could not be taken as 'irrelevant'[121]. He also stated that the power struggle was usually limited to, and often expressed in, 'narrow forms' of struggle characterised by local conditions such as disputes over crop share and wage[122]. "While class-type differences exist, they have not been especially acute.[123]" Further discussion on this topic will be presented in Chapter Five.

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[116] The Minority Rights Group International. Dhaka, 1997. p. 545
[117] Bertocci, 1970; Also, Ahmed, 1981
[118] Blair, 1974; Also, Van Schendel, 1976
[119] Wood, 1981. pp. 2-15
[120] Jansen, 1986; Also, Van-Schendel, 1982; Jannuzi and Peach, 1980
[121] Wood, 1994
[122] Wood, 1981. p. 14
[123] Hossain, 2003. p. 24

Conclusion

This chapter starts with lively debates, presented by subaltern scholars and Marxist writers, of the nature of the organisation of agrarian struggles that Bangladesh's Dinajpur region has historically witnessed. In the analysis of the subaltern scholars, the agency and causes of local groups were stressed; the Marxist writers stressed the influence of external ideas in the development of these struggles. To understand the dynamics of the ongoing movement against the mine this research attempts to look at both sides.

The context within which Independent Bangladesh emerged is characterised by diverse social and political inspirations. The later part of the chapter has traced the emergence of the 'political culture' and political practices important for understanding the nature and practices of resistance. The urge for a Bengali identity within Muslim society forced the emergence of the Bangladeshi nationalism that led to the War of Independence and the formation of a Bangladesh state. The essence of the Bengali identity follows a history of interaction between different social, political and scholarly elements. Intelligentsia played major role in forcing a Bengali linguistic identity through the Bengali language movement in the 1950s, which led to the emergence of an independent Bangladesh. In collaboration with activists of left political parties and other right wing parties, University students and the academia in Eastern Bengal led the language movement in demand of Bengali as state language. Through their literary practices, the East-Bengal literati expressed a desire for a 'secular' Muslim society in the eastern part of Pakistan.

The history of independent Bangladesh is characterised by the desire of the intellectuals of a 'secular' Muslim society that, as we have seen, accommodated different inspirational elements. The struggles over land, the history of the 'unrequited trade' of the foreign company, the neoliberal reforms in post-independence Bangladesh, and the contradictions of the 'homogenous' portrayal of Bangladesh configure the background to Phulbari resistance where 'nationalist' discourses are central to the dissent. Intellectuals, as we will see, play important role in organising the protests against the Phulabri mine where protest is expressed through idioms of 'nationalism'. A complex picture of how 'nationalist' discourses around the planned mine contain varying ideas is presented in the next part of the chapter.

Chapter Four

Idioms and sentiments of 'nationalism' in the Phulbari movement

We have resources beneath our land

We won't let foreigners take them away

We have manpower we will buy technology

We will use the resources ourselves

Brother, let us build our country

('Anti-Asia Enery' song[1])

Throughout my research I continuously observed the language of nationalism being used as a way of formulating resistance to the Phulbari mine. In this chapter I explore the ideas of nationalism and nationalist discourses as they apply to the movement against Asia Energy's proposed coal mining project in Phulbari.

Leaflets, wall posters, banners, and newspapers articles all discuss national interests in relation to the Phulbari coal mine. Reading these documents, with their polemic facts and figures, gave me a sense of the terrain of claims and anti-claims where both pro-mining and anti-mining groups manifest the 'best interest of the nation'. The ways in which groups project the best interests of the nation are related to the way they characterise the agenda as 'nationalists'. As we will see facts, figures and expert analyses are put into action to legitimise the respective ways in which action is seen as 'good' or 'bad' for the nation. It is impossible to ascertain if one particular way is right or wrong /'good or bad', but everyone agrees that the interests of the nation are paramount. Truth is not always important in nationalist claims[2] to characterise a particular kind of nationalism. I will examine to what extent the nationalist claims and ideas of the Phulbari movement draw on differential knowledge and observation.

Writers and intellectuals opposed to mining in Bangladesh use imaginings of 'the nation' and 'national interests' to promote their cause. In doing so they would,

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[1] Written by Khademul Islam, an activist in Phulbari
[2] Renan, 1947 cited in Kohl, 1998. p. 230

according to their line of activism/counter-activism, chalk out what type of nation Bangladesh should be. I will examine how these imaginings of 'the nation' are actually played out in the Phulbari protest movement; how 'national interests' are projected by different groups at the national level and how they are perceived at the actual mining 'site'. This will help to identify and understand where and how these ideas conflict or intersect.

**   **

Proponents and opponents of mining have both increased in Bangladesh in recent years. Mining has been propagated as a wheel for economic growth and 'development' as much as exploitation of local resources, the communities and environmental destruction projects. Gas and coal are the natural resources in Bangladesh that have attracted a considerable amount of interest from foreign mining companies, many of who, in turn, have faced active protests in the form of open demonstrations or organised attacks on the mining establishments from local communities, and national and international campaign groups. The mining companies have been attacked and held accountable by campaigners on a wide range of issues, for example, the declared amount of mineral deposits, details of financial and legal deals between the government and the companies, promised compensation to people affected by the mining activities, possible environmental impacts etc. On the other hand, mining companies have engaged their respective governments to lobby the Bangladesh government.

Natural gas is the leading natural resource in Bangladesh, which, until 1992, was primarily dealt with by state-owned companies. To attract foreign investment the natural gas sector was opened to foreign companies in 1993. The US based multinational corporation Chevron, UK's Cairn Energy and Canada's Niko were awarded exploration and production contracts in the new scenario of investment in the gas sector. During this period the government formed a new National Energy Policy under which territory and offshore sites of Bangladesh were divided into 23 blocks and opened to foreign bidding for oil and gas exploration and production. Out of 23 blocks eight were awarded to foreign companies up until 2006[3]. This trend of foreign

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[3] Bangladesh Energy Data, Statistics and Analysis - Oil, Gas, Electricity, Coal.
(http://www.eia.doe.gov/emeu/cabs/Bangladesh/pdf.pdf)

investment in mining coal continued with the coal mine deal in Phulbari and the subsequent protests, as previously discussed.

The Bangladesh Government's policy on natural resources has been influenced by international institutions such as the Asian Development Bank (ADB). Policy advice by ADB in many cases stood in sharp contrast to left-aligned national activist groups and national and international campaigners who were scrutinizing natural resource extraction processes in terms of 'the interests of the nation'. Gas export is a hotly debated issue in Bangladesh. ADB had long suggested that the government export of natural gas to India would strengthen Bangladesh's volatile finance sector. Though ADB suggested that Bangladesh has an exportable amount of surplus natural gas, the presence of widely varying estimates of natural gas reserves puts the export suggestion in question. ADB has also been a strong supporter of a recent investment proposal of the India based international corporation TATA. TATA submitted an investment proposal to establish an export oriented steel and fertilizer manufacturing factory which required the use of the country's natural gas for 20 years. This proposal was viewed by national activist groups as a gas export plan in another form, and criticized TATA and ADB's proposals as being a project to satisfy the international capital markets but ignore domestic demand. ADB also considered offering a loan to the Phulbari coal mine project proposed by UK based mining company Asia Energy, which they withdrew following criticism from national activist groups[4]. In criticising ADB's consideration for a loan for the Phulbari project Anu Muhammad, a central leader of the Dhaka-based activist group National Committee, writes:

> "Global agencies systematically worked to grab the resources in favour of global corporate. [….]. Why is profit for a company preferable to agencies like ADB even if it costs peoples lives and livelihood? [..] The ADB is generally known as the 'World Bank of Asia', that always goes hand in hand with the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund in pursuing neoliberal policies that put corporate profit as the supreme objective. Along with the World Bank, the ADB projects helped multinational companies to grab natural resources on terms and conditions that are very unfavourable for the people.

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[4] See ADB's website http://pid.adb.org:8040/pid/PsView.htm?projNo=39933&seqNo=01&typeCd=4
Also, Bank Information centre's website http://www.bicusa.org/en/index.aspx

This is a roadmap to ensure gravitation of businesses to big corporate bodies and yet creating and trumpeting a myth that these are for development and poverty reduction. People in Phulbari gave their lives to stop the open pit mining project, making clear that they will not accept any foreign direct investment that goes against national interest."[5]

This demonstrates that western donors were constructed as securing the interests of multinational, as opposed to national, interests and shows how nationalist discourse is shaped in oppositional relation to donors, and foreign and multinational corporations.

The Bangladeshi government's approach towards mining development favours foreign investment and this extends to the proposed Phulbari coal mine project. But the government's claim to economic growth through foreign investment in the Phulbari mine had to be legitimised by representing it as in the national interest. For example, the Daily Star quoted a central leader of the present government, the AL, as saying:

"What is the point in keeping coal beneath the ground? The government should go for the extraction of coal as it will allow us to use the coal for the generation of electricity for the country. If coal is extracted from the mine, there will be environmental problems in one or two places in the country, not all over the country."[6]

The reason the government wanted to achieve general consensus about the claim to economic benefit through the implementation of Asia Energy's proposed mine was related to electoral politics. There has been an understanding in government in recent times that, without the general support of people, foreign mining initiatives in Phulbari could have a negative impact on the party during national elections. Although Phulbari's electoral constituency has been held by the Awami League for the last three consecutive national elections, they lost the last local government election[7] to a

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[5] "Projects of Mass Destruction: ABD and the Case of Phulbari Project". Editorial. Anu Muhammad. New Age. May 19, 2007
[6] The Daily Star, June 11, 2009
[7] The local government election referred here is the Upazilla (sub-district) election through which the representatives (Upazilla Chairman) of sub-districts, the second lowest tier of regional administration in Bangladesh, are elected through popular elections. An Upazilla Chairman looks after certain administrative functions of the government at the sub-district level. The national elections, on the other hand, are held to elect the representatives for the national parliament (Member of Parliament). An electoral constituency for the national election is usually larger than a sub-district.

candidate supported by the National Committee. It is generally believed that public support for the National Committee's anti-mining movement helped the Committee's candidate to win Phulbari's local government election. As a leader of the Awami League in Phulbari put it,

> "He wouldn't have won the election if there was no movement against mining. People thought they would be displaced by mining so they voted for the candidate who campaigns against mining[8]."

On taking their seat in December 2008 after winning in the parliamentary election, this understanding led the Awami League to mobilise public support in favour of mining as expressed by their party member in Phulbari:

> "Actually those protesters misinformed the people. If mining really brings that bad of an impact we would definitely go against mining as we are always with people. Now we need to give the people right information."[9]

The Awami League initially opposed the proposal when the mining exploration deal between the government (BNP) and Asia Energy was conducted; the chief of the Awami League vowed support for the movement during a party meeting in Phulbari in 2006 and called for anti-government movement to stop mining. The Daily Star, a national daily, quoted the party chief as saying that the deal with Asia Energy meant selling the country's resources.[10] The BNP government later stalled the deal with Asia Energy and its field activities following public protest, death and casualties in August 2006. When the Awami League came into power in 2008 they changed their stance and did not cancel the deal with Asia Energy. The BNP, on the other hand, shifted from their pro-mining stance when they became the opposition party after loosing the election to the Awami League and shifted their support for the National Committee's protest against the mine. The BNP voiced their support for the Phulbari movement when the National Committee called for a countrywide 'hartal' protesting against a police attack on their central leaders during a protest in the capital, on September 14, 2009. Earning general consensus over mining matters, whether in support or

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[8] A leader of the Awami League in Phulbari

[9] A party member of the Awami League in Phulbari.

[10] The Daily Star, September 05, 2006

opposition, is central to political processes, and one of the inspirations for earning such support lies in electoral politics. The testimony below from an incumbent party (Awami League) member in Phulbari illustrates this,

> "It is easy to say anything when you are not in power. It is easy to oppose government to earn peoples' vote. We cannot dance with others who are jumping against mining without any knowledge on it. It's a cheap way to attract popularity and vote. We need to make people understand where our national benefit lies. As an elected government this is our duty because they have voted for us."[11]

The shift in the party stance as it applies to the Phulbari coal mine is accompanied by a shift in ideas about national benefits as propagated by the parties. The opposition party (Awami League) provided support for the anti-mining campaign in a 2006 public meeting at Phulbari with its view that the mining proposed by Asia Energy would be destructive for Phulbari and the nation. Open-pit mining by the foreign company Asia Energy, it said, would not bring any benefit for the nation. These statements were published in the national dailies. Now the Awami League is in power and a shift in ideas about what is in the national interest is clearly identifiable. Different government personnel, including ministers and high ranking officials have been advocating the implementation of Asia Energy's proposed coal mine to enhance the national economy. These ideas are frequently expressed in TV talk shows and public meetings. 'The Phulbari coal mine is a necessity for the nation,' said a senior leader of the government party stressing the necessity of the mine for economic benefits during a meeting in Phulbari[12].

This is not to say that this shift in ideas as propagated by the government machineries is simply to cover the fact that they have to deal with state obligations which lie in the bureaucratic and legal aspects of the contracts made between the Government and Asia Energy. Some mining experts have voiced the opinion that Asia Energy's proposed mine is indeed beneficial for the nation's interests given that local people are provided with adequate compensation. They debated in favour of the open-pit mining method

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[11] A government party activist in Phulbari.
[12] I attended the meeting . November 25, 2010 in Phulbari.

proposed by Asia Energy, which involves the displacement of people to allow for digging large pits for coal extraction.

When asked about the ongoing resistance to Asia Energy a manager of the Boropukuria coal mine, which is adjacent to Phulbari, expressed his opinion as follows:

> "See an open-pit mine is beneficial for our country as 90% of the coal is extractable in this method. We need to understand that there is no point of keeping coal under earth. We have to extract it and open-pit method is the best method to benefit most from it. If we can extract 80 to 90% coal from Phulbari project we will be a nation with surplus electricity as there will be enough coal to generate electricity. Open-pit method is a highly expensive and complicated process. We need a company like Asia Energy."

National dailies also publish articles about how the nation could benefit from the coal that would be extracted from the mine. Often facts, figures and success cases are publicized to negate the anti-mining group's concerns. One of the articles in a national daily stated:

> "Electricity is our national problem. Boa electricity plant in Germany is producing 11 thousand MWs electricity from coal that has only one third heat value of our high quality coal in Phulbari. They have done it in very environment friendly way. It is quite possible to set up an environmentally friendly coal-fired electricity plant. Boa plant is a prime example" (translated from Bengali. Ajker Kagoj. 18th August 2007).

Newspapers bring the commentary and claims of the pro-mining group to the attention of the nation. The country's most highly circulated national English daily, The Daily Star,[13] reported:

> "Business leaders of different chamber bodies of northern districts at a discussion at a city hotel yesterday urged the government to move to develop the Phulbari coal mine without any further delay. 'We can easily produce 3,500MW of electricity from the coal to be extracted from the Phulbari mine,'

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[13] For circulation statistics, as claimed by the newspaper, see www.thedailystar.net

said Chamber President, adding that as the country's gas reserve is depleting
fast, coal is becoming the only option for power generation."

The report adds:

"They saw the huge coal reserve at the Phulbari coal mine as the only option
now to deal with a future energy crisis, particularly in power generation" (The
Daily Star, August 27, 2008).

Newspapers and publications also feature in the spread of claims and propagations put
forward by the groups involved in anti-mining campaigns. The National Committee
(NC), the group that initiated the protests, has made the protection of national interest
its rallying cry[14]. NC operates at the national level and has increasing numbers of local
committees at district and sub-district levels in several regions of the country. Members
of NC include influential intellectuals, university academicians, writers, engineers and
left wing political leaders. Their voices are heard regularly in local newspapers and TV
talk shows. Some publishing houses regularly publish books and articles written by
scholars involved with NC. One such book written by Anu Muhammad, a University
Professor and central leader of NC, entitled 'Phulbari koila khoni - kar lav kar khoti'
(Phulbari Coal Mine - Whose Profit Whose Loss), was distributed at a nominal price or
for free, amongst the educated community of Phulbari. For the NC it has become an
intellectual project to provide the anti-mining campaign with the necessary equipment,
such as books and articles, to make this a part of the national agenda. For example,
Samhati, a publisher in the capital, has been highlighting the destructive impact of
open-pit coal mining as interpreted by NC oriented social scientists, economists and
engineers. Often these publications, in booklet format, provide facts and figures, as
provided in pro-mining claims, about how the Phulbari open-pit coal mine project
would go against the national interest:

"Asia Energy Corporation will sell its extracted coal to domestic and
international markets for a nominal 6% royalty per annum which is 45 million
USD per annum along with an additional 200 million USD as corporate tax.
That is 1500 crore Bangladehsi taka. The company on the other hand will earn
1,50,000 crore taka per year from the coal they will extract with a total

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[14] The make up of the NC and the background of its formation is discussed at length in Chapter Seven.

investment of 9,100 crore taka in 30 years."(Phulbari koilakhoni. Translated form Bengali)[15]

NC activists distributed this booklet at the national level and in Phulbari, and provided it to me when I wanted to learn about the Phulbari movement. The author of this booklet writes for the Daily Star, the national daily that also reports a pro-mining lobby. The highest circulated daily (Prothom Alo) reported this anti-mining story with the headline: "Open-pit mining for lifting coal in massive scale will be disastrous for the country". In the article, movement activists are reported as saying, "Giving away the resource means giving away the soil" (Prothom Alo; June 26, 2006). With these contradicting stories, the country's most circulated newspaper becomes a platform for competing nationalist ideas. The spread of nationalist discourses does not rely or have to rely on 'unified fields of communication'[16] or unified elements of 'print capitalism'[17].

<center>** **</center>

Nationalist discourse as propagated by the NC is internally diverse. As previously discussed, within the manifestation of NC's protests national interests are often set as being opposed to a global force, i.e. the mining company. NC has declared itself a national alliance to protect national interests from profit seeking multinationals. Asia Energy has been marked as a global force that has entered the country to loot its natural resources while destroying local livelihoods and the environment. NC's political project is publicized in documents and leaflets where national interest is opposed to foreign and global power; as illustrated by the following points found in a NC leaflet[18]:

1. No foreign company will be allowed to extract coal from Phulbari

2. No coal will be exported.

3. Asia Energy proposed open-pit method will not be allowed to be implemented

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[15] Mohammad, 2006[Phulbari koila khoni- kar khoti kar lav (Phulbari coal project- whose loss, whose profit)]
[16] Wogan, 2001
[17] Anderson stressed on the role of 'print capitalism' in forming nationalism.
[18] The leaflet entitled 'Jatio Committee er ahoban'. National Committee to Protect Oil Gas Mineral Resources Power and Ports, Dhaka, 2008. p. 1

4. Foreign companies are profit seeking, and their main goal is to loot our resources.

5. Foreign companies will destroy our environment and the local livelihood for their profit.

6. To protect our coal we have to press imperialist multinational force Asia Energy out of our country.

(Similar demands were made in numerous newspaper articles, for example, Shomakal. Dec. 18, 2008)

There are, however, 'cleavages' in the nationalism spouted by different NC activists. To understand the nationalist discourses as propagated by NC, we need to look at their formation and ideological background[19]. The formation of NC has a background in the ideological conflicts between some left-leaning political leaders. There are differences in the ways that various left-oriented political parties in Bangladesh conceive the ideologies of socialism. Some of them form alliances to participate in the national election and believe winning national elections should be the way to capture power and serve the poor. Others follow orthodox Marxism and believe in capturing power through class struggle. During the 1990's some leaders and activists from this second group started to raise theoretical questions about the applicability of orthodox Marxism to organise masses of people to fight for their rights and contemporary national issues. This group called for the necessity of a revision of theoretical orthodoxy according to the demands of present time. It was during this time that the government was making deals with several foreign companies to explore oil and gas. This group felt the necessity of organising people of all segments to protect the natural resources from foreign companies as they felt foreign companies had only come to exploit the country's natural resources. Other leaders in the party felt that a class struggle by the masses would be the only way to protect the interests of the poor. In the name of national interests, a revision to the party ideology would be considered as a betrayal to the party. With this background, some leaders and activists resigned from the party and later formed a national forum that mainly included representatives from other left parties willing to work with all segments of society, as well as intellectuals and

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[19] More specific discussion about the kinds of people in this group and its group character is presented in Chapter Seven.

professionals. This national forum was later named the National Committee to Protect Oil Gas Electricity Natural Resources and Port, popularly known as the National Committee, or NC.

In a broad sense, the committee consists of two types of people who can be loosely categorised as people who have a lineage in left politics and those who don't. The supporters and activists of the NC consist of all kinds of people coming from different ways of thought and socio-political backgrounds. This mix of ideas and other internal 'cleavages' puts the dominant ideas of national interest (manifested by NC) under constant revision. If the NC's movement is dominated by idioms of an anti-Multinational and 'anti-foreign company' framed within 'culture of nationalism'[20], then that culture is subject to negotiation depending on the situation. Maintaining cohesion within the committee is one such situation. Some actors would challenge the dominant ideas if they feel them inappropriate. Collaborating with national and international NGOs and multinational campaign groups presented a challenge for some of the NC member's pre-defined position about NGOs as there was a general consensus amongst left politicians that NGOs were the collaborators of the imperialist West and they didn't do any good for the people.

> "Resist the neo-imperialist agent – NGOs and their exploitation" (written in a leaflet distributed by Jatio Krishok Khet Majur Shamity. A grassroots, leftist political party. April 17, 2005)

But some other members felt the need to collaborate with NGOs and other campaign groups who were willing to work against the mine project. They felt it would strengthen the force of the protest and take it to larger audiences. Eventually this prompted NC to change its previous position and engage with national and international NGOs.

> "We have to make lot of negotiations and revisions of our strategy for the larger goal of the group's cohesion. We had to debate a lot within the group to agree on the decision of working with NGOs." (a leader of NC; January 14, 2009).

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[20] Clifford, 1988

Some people within the movement have different ideas about how the nation could best benefit, however, expert knowledge and popular views often contradict those points. One such example is regarding the use of a foreign company for coal extraction in Phulbari where two opposing views are held by the members of the same protest groups The benchmark slogan for the movement is – "No foreign company, no open-pit method, no export", however, varying articles published at different times by some activists of NC, who are experts on mining and the national economy, state that foreign companies and expatriates can extract the coal if the state has full ownership of the company[21].

Certain categories of people find themselves in a 'grey zone' between the dominant ideas of the movement and pro-mining ideas[22]. While supporting the NC movement they also sympathize with some claims of pro-mining groups. The question of the appropriate method for coal mining is one such issue that has created heated debates among people who generally support the anti-Asia Energy movement; which method of mining, open pit or underground, would be most beneficial for the nation's economy? Where the open pit mining method would displace a large number of people in the mining areas and extract most of the coal deposited, an underground method would extract far less coal without displacing people from the surface. While the demand of the NC movement is to resist the open-pit method in favour of an underground mine with national ownership, opposing views on the mining method to be employed exist within the people generally supportive of the movement. I, along with some NC local activists in Phulbari, went to meet with an employee of Boropukuria coal mine who, as I had been informed by local activists, was sympathetic to the movement. When asked what he thought about Asia Energy's proposal of an open-pit mining method he answered—

> "I am a supporter of the anti-mining Phulbari movement as we need to protect our coal for our own use. But we are seeing Boropukuria underground mine that hardly feeds any profit to the country. It's because we cannot extract even 5% of total the deposit with this method. Coal is our nation's valuable

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[21] For example, in Somokal, Dec 18, 2008

[22] Eriksen (2002) uses the term in discussing a middle position between ethnicity and nationalism. A position where, rather than complete autonomy, some people would demand for some of their rights within an existing nation/state

resource...before wasting it with the underground method we need to think carefully. (Interview in January, 2010)".

While the open-pit method is viewed as destructive for the nation due to perceived negative impacts, such as pollution of water bodies by contaminated water extracted from the underground coal pits, a completely opposing view about this mining method can also be identified within the movement using the same reasoning of national interest, thereby finding itself in a 'grey zone'.

The nation's interest, as projected in the claims and demands of the movement, is sometimes contradicted as it applies to the interests of a particular group within the movement. Particular groups within the movement sometimes challenge the general or 'dominant' formulation of national claims and demands, or conversely, simply withdraw their commitment to certain nationalist demands when they contradict the interests of their own/local community. A classic example of this kind of contradiction derives from Borogram village in Phulbari, the village where the majority of my research was conducted. Before I started my work in the village, local NC activists in Phulbari City told me that they receive strong and continuous collaboration from Borogram village. One NC activist stated, "It would be dangerous for anyone to even name Asia Energy there – people would be furious." NC activists who visited the village for periodical meetings and discussions about the movement made such comments to me on a consistent basis; they considered the village as the stronghold of their movement. However, long-term participant observation later revealed that while people did indeed have anti-Asia Energy sentiment it was not consistent with what the Phulbari activists had told me. Instead 'anti-Asia Energy' sentiment meant anti-mining in any form, regardless of method and ownership, foreign or national, yet coalesced under a banner of 'anti-Asia Energy'. Such a banner proliferates into documents. For example, the letter sent to the ADB, signed by NC activists and local actors, in opposition to its plan to provide financial support to Asia Energy, states:

> "The long struggle of the people of Phulbari and the sacrifices made for this cause firmly state that open pit coal mining in a densely populated region like Bangladesh will not be accepted by the local people. Coal extracted from this country should only be used for the benefit of this country. No percentage of the coal will be exported. Therefore, we, the people of this potential mining area,

request the ADB to remove its financial support from the Phulbari project. [Failing to do so] it would become obvious that the ADB is taking a position against national interest, the environment and the people of Bangladesh by prioritizing the business interests of a company like Asia Energy"[23] - on behalf of the people of Phulabri

The 'anti-Asia Energy' sentiments in this letter reflect the inconsistency of opinions of the national interest and allows them to conflate as the groups and actors use opposition to Asia Energy a common political project.

Opposition to mining of any form is related to a number of socio-political factors and people's experiences of the impact of neighbouring Boropukuria's underground coal mine; an elaborate discussion on this will be presented in Chapter Six (Part One). Experiences of landslides and other impacts felt in Boropukuria, which is only a couple of miles away, created a situation where the national movement's endorsement for underground mining method has been challenged, as is expressed in the following testimony of one resident in Borogram village:

"If we are to move away from our land for the underground method as well then there would be no mine here. Who is the mine for? What would I do with national interest if we lose everything anyway? What is our gain if we are displaced and the country gets coal and electricity from it? National interest and our local interests both have to be secured."

National interests in these statements are contested by particularistic concerns. Although protests against Asia Energy's open-pit mine have always been there, opposition to an underground mine developed only after Boropukuria's underground mine caused landslides and the loss of agricultural land. Boropukuria coal mine is an underground mine where coal is extracted without displacing the people on the surface. The mine is owned and managed by a state owned company and operated by Chinese contractors. The mine areas are located about five miles from Borogram village. Parts of the mine areas have recently been affected by landslides caused by underground pits

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[23] Letter sent to the President and Executive Directors, Asian Development Bank. Date: December 15, 2007. Available at www.forum-adb.org/BACKUP/...Phulbari/CommunityLetter%20English

made for coal extraction; these landslides have resulted in the loss of agricultural land for many villagers.

The contestation is essentially between national and local interests. Following growing tensions around underground mines, activists in Phulbari City discussed how to address this contradiction. The result was the decision to leave the proposal of underground mining at the local level for discussion while continuing to oppose Asia Energy's open-pit method. The best method for mining without displacing people from their land was left to be decided later. Though the decision was not a written one, efforts have been made to look for alternative mining methods that do not threaten local peoples land. Recently a solution has been proposed involving an innovative method where coal will be fired underground to generate gas to be used for electricity and other purposes. In this way, coal will not be extracted from underground thereby minimising the threat of landslides to the local communities. Revised movement ideas are, thus, being formulated to create cohesion between the national and particular.

Conclusion

I have discussed how opposition to and compliance with the mining project is expressed through idioms and sentiments of nationalism. Both the pro-mining and anti-mining position uses the natural resources (e.g. coal, gas) as foci for wider concerns of how Bangladesh's future should look. "What does our country mean to me"[24]- this question shapes discourses of national interests as they apply to the mine. Groups find the meaning of mining in their own analysis of national interests, which, in turn, inform their position towards the mine.

As Mushtaq Khan[25] notes, competing perceptions of economic interest characterises the political conflicts in present-day Bangladesh. The NC's Dhaka-based Phulbari movement's nationalist language is characterised by the country's economic and social interests. Drawing from the same nationalist sentiment, pro-mining groups argue their case as expressed here: "Asia Energy's investment will help industrialization in the country. This project will have long-term positive impacts on the country's

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[24] West (1997) showed how the 'Feminist Nationalism' is shaped by women's search for the answers of this question where women analyze the meaning of 'national cause' for their own case. p. 1

[25] Khan, 2000

development. The high quality coal from this project will generate our much needed electricity" (North Bengal People's Welfare Association in The Daily Inquilab, August 9, 2006). In response to the anti-mining movement's concern about the environment, one local journalist who is working for a pro-mining bulletin Uttorbanga Khanij Barta commented, "…see your shoes will not remain new if you wear them. For the benefit of country's economy we have to sacrifice the environment a bit"[26]. Rather than a unified 'print capitalism' a contested print language features the nationalist propagation in the movement. Thus, we do not find idioms of nationalism in the Phulbari movement in the context of what Molly Doane[27] called a 'homogenized ideological construct'. Factors such as electoral politics define on which side of the movement two major political parties will stand. A change of government means a change in the way the national interest is articulated. While the articulation of national interests is contested between pro-mining and anti-mining groups, it is also challenged by elements within the movement. A general formulation of claims and demands are questioned by particular kinds of members within the movement who agree with some of its proposals and doubt others. Yet, they coalesce under a banner of anti-Asia energy as a way to think about nationalism. Metaphors of national interests cover the 'cleavages'[28] in the forms of nationalism.

We have discussed that the particular interests of Borogram village contradict dominant ideas of national interest resulting in a rescaling of movement agendas. Anti-mining takes a very different form at the local level, which will be explored further in the context of Borogram village. To facilitate that discussion the next chapter lays out the social context of the village.

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[26] Commented in one of my interview
[27] Doane, 2005
[28] Chatterjee, 1993

Chapter Five

(Re)building a 'Chapai' village:
Social organisations and relations in Borogram

Outline

As we have seen, Dinajpur district had a history of peasant resistance[1] during colonial rule. The land relations in which these resistances emerged have undergone various changes since independence. Thus, the social relations inherent in present-day resistance to the Asia Energy project in Phulbari need to be understood within the context of this changed scenario. As such, this chapter is primarily concerned with the village of Borogram, where a larger part of my research was conducted. This will provide an understanding of the context of the social relations in which resistance in Borogram operates. The history of Borogram village, as explored in parts of this chapter, will show how particular histories of land dispossession and the social cost it incurred informs the spheres of resistance; this is elaborated on in the following chapter.

To establish the background of present-day resistance in this predominantly agriculture-based rural society, this chapter starts with a brief discussion of the changes in land relations that have taken place since independence from the colonial system under which the peasant's resistance spread. The main body of the chapter is focused on more context-specific discussions about aspects of social and political relations pertinent to the resistance movement in Borogram village.

1. Introduction: towards present day resistance

James Scott[2] chose the term 'moral economy' in his analysis of the nature of a peasant's rebellion in South-east Asia during the 1930s. Using the Saya San rebellion in Burma and the Nghe-Tinh Soviets in central Vietnam during the 1930s as an example, he argues that peasants seek secure subsistence rather than higher-risk maximum returns. He called this the moral economy of the subsistence ethic, which,

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[1] As discussed in the first chapter
[2] Scott, 1976. p. 25

for Scott, characterises the theme of peasant protest throughout this period. He stressed the presence of two themes; "First, claims on peasant incomes by landlords, money lenders, or the state were never legitimate when they infringed on what was judged to be the minimal culturally defined subsistence level; and second, the product of the land should be distributed in such a way that all were guaranteed a subsistence niche."[3]

For Scott, two major transformations during the colonial period in South-east Asia undermined pre-existing 'social insurance' in the form of social networks and patron-client relations in feudal societies, and the moral economy of subsistence ethic. One transformation was the penetration of capitalism, which made the land a commodity and took it away from peasants, resulting in a loss of 'free usufruct' rights and turning them into tenants or agrarian wage labourers. The other transformation was the related development of modern states under colonial auspices where the machineries of new state institutions not only ensured this transformation, but the state emerged as 'claimant' of the peasant's resources in the form of tax and revenues, which provoked resistance and rebellion in peasant societies. In this sense, peasant resistance during capitalist transformation arose from a lack of the socially and culturally perceived 'minimum income' that is necessary for a household to observe certain social and ceremonial obligations, to feed it adequately, and to continue to cultivate. In this way, Scott connected the states and agrarian structures with more micro-level issues of household budgets and peasant - family relations in his understanding of peasant resistance. Factors, such as alliances with other classes and the capacity of the collective organisation of the peasants, determined whether or not the exploited situation would turn into rebellion.

When looking at the premises of agrarian resistance in colonial Bengal, I find myself compelled by Scott's analysis. As discussed in the first chapter, during colonial rule Bengal's land management system underwent a series of changes that detracted from traditional land relations of patron-client(ism), where the latter had flexible tax and revenue payment options with landlords, and sometimes directly with state officials. Under British rule, the land system was thoroughly changed with the introduction of 'permanent settlement'[4], where revenue was collected from the cultivators through

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[3] Scott, 1976. p. 10
[4] The permanent settlement act formally enacted in 1793.

various new classes of intermediaries. The possession of large land-holdings, *Zamindari*, was made a commodity of the market where anyone with purchasing capacity could buy in exchange for yearly fixed revenue. As land became a commodity of the market, a new breed of landlords, *Zamindars*, mostly coming from the class of businessmen or officials, emerged with no hereditary connections or relations with the rural cultivators. Holding the authority to fix the revenue for whatever amount they wished, these landlords often charged the cultivators much higher rates than those to be paid to the government (for the different forms of hidden and open charges, see Guha, 1996[5]). Coming from a city background, these landlords often assigned or sublet their land to various categories of middlemen to manage the revenue and/or crop collection, thereby further distancing traditional landlord-cultivator relations. Under the circumstances, cultivator and sharecropper feelings of exploitation came to a pinnacle with the organisational facilitation of communist activists from the cities in the form of the sharecroppers' rebellion.

It would be misleading to see the present-day rural resistance to the proposed destruction of agricultural land and displacement as simply an extension of sharecroppers' resistance as structured in the colonial era. Land relations under colonial rule went through several reform attempts since independence in 1947. During the Pakistan period, The East Bengal State Acquisition Act of 1950[6] was enacted to direct the abolition of the Permanent Settlement Act of 1793 and the colonial system of revenue collections through *Zamindars* and intermediaries. Designed to put an end to the right of *Zamindars* to act as agents of the State, the Act was meant to put "the state into direct de jure relationship with rent-paying cultivators of land."[7] This part of reform was interpreted by some writers as going back to Bengal's traditional system as it had existed during the Muslim period, prior to colonial rule.[8] However, many have disagreed as to what extent this Act actually eliminated property rights of big landlords. Barkat, as well as others[9], presented land data to show that the *Zamindars* used their connections in administration to retain ownership of large land holdings under their kin

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[5] Guha, 1996
[6] The act was later renamed as the East Pakistan State Acquisition and Tenancy Act, 1950.
[7] Jannuzi and Peach, 1980. p. 9
[8] For example, the argument of L. Kabir in Land Laws in East Pakistan, 1961. p. 6
[9] Barkat and Zaman, 1997

under the new status of *Maliks*, i.e. land-holding tenants of the State[10]. Nevertheless, the Act did officially invalidate the authority of land-holding intermediaries to control the revenue amounts charged to cultivators.[11]

Since the emergence of an independent Bangladesh in 1971 there have been additional attempts at land reform. The 1970's saw the ceiling on the size of private landholdings lowered to 33.3 acres, with the intention of preventing *Zamindar*-type landlords from emerging[12]. Redistribution of unused government-owned land, also known as *Khas land*, among the landless poor was stressed in land legislation of the 1980s[13]. While these reform attempts did not completely diminish the presence of big landlords, who continued to possess more land than the official ceiling through disguised ownership, they did detract from the land-holders authority to control revenue collection systems. On the other hand, the Act of 1950 finally implemented the colonial ruler's promise to provide individual ownership rights to land that they had cultivated for over one decade. With the official right to sell these lands, these cultivator-owners emerged as a new category of landowner-peasant in the agrarian structures[14]. This was a category that had been previously absent under the colonial land system where cultivators remained tenants without any permanent ownership rights over the land. As such, present rural Bangladesh does not merely consist of small peasants and landless poor whose subsistence is uniformly in danger. Though over eighty percent of Bangladeshi people live in rural areas, the majority of whom are involved agricultural subsistence, and it is true that agricultural labourers and landless people make up the highest proportion of rural residents, the patterns of land ownership, notions of land relations, and the nature of social structures are distinct throughout the different regions of Bangladesh[15]. What follows, is an attempt, based on my ethnographic observations, to present aspects of social structure and relations within Borogram, close to Phulbari town. As we shall see, this has had a direct effect on localised perception of, and resistance to, mining.

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[10] Jannauzi and Peach, 1980. p. 10
[11] Jannuzi and Peach, 1980
[12] Barkat et al, 1997; Jannuzi and peach, 1980
[13] Barkat and Zaman, 2001
[14] Barkat and Zaman, 2001
[15] Wood, 1981. p. 4

2. Borogram Village

"Remain cautious when you go to the village. People don't like any outsider in the village. They might think you are one of those survey people trying to gather information on behalf of the mining company." These were some early words of caution provided by the activists in Dhaka as I was preparing to go to Borgram village for the first time. I was told outsiders in the villages are seen as suspicious because the villagers do not want Asia Energy's people gaining access to the villages.

Earlier I described the context within which my access to Borogram had to be won through my contacts among Phulbari town activists that maintained connections with the village actors. During my early stay in the village an activist from the town and one of his friends from the village served as my guides to avoid any misunderstandings about my purpose. Throughout my fieldwork I was assisted by town activists and their village contacts to negotiate access to particular members of the village. Though I was able to secure my stay in the village and participate in daily events, access to individual informants remained a challenge throughout my stay. It was simply not possible for my early contacts in the village to negotiate access everywhere I went and with everyone I talked to. In addition, not everyone in the village was convinced by the assurance of my contacts. This restricted my ability to collect stories and narratives through elaborate discussions with the village actors. Even those people who I was introduced to as a University student doing research for academic purposes were generally uninterested in engaging in extensive discussions or in-depth interviews. I consistently observed a degree of discomfort on the part of the villagers to speak with an outsider, particularly when it came to the issues around mining. I negotiated these limitations by participating in daily events, observing village life, and through informal discussions and interviews, and collecting oral histories where possible. Through these activities I developed my understanding of the context and complexities of the protests in the village. This is reflected in the way the material is often presented in the third person, rather than through narratives and life histories.

2.1 The setting

From my past experiences of short-term field research in parts of rural Bangladesh, I have learned that it is courteous to first approach gatekeepers. As such, when an activist

from Phulbari town, who guided me into the village, placed me before the village activist leaders, I assumed they were leaders, particularly as they promised me cooperation from the village during my stay. Over time, as my understating matured, I found that the category 'leader' and its accompanying qualities had multiple facets depending on the processes of specific social events. This is elaborated on within discussions about social and political relations in the village later on in the chapter.

The village is located approximately five kilometres from Phulbari Town, the centre of organised protest activities. The total population of Borogram lives in over five hundred different households. According to documents from the Phulbari Coal Mine Project, published by Asia Energy, it is projected that over the thirty five-year lifetime of the mine it will gradually span over 5,933 hectares of land, roughly sixty square kilometres. Along with parts of Phulbari Town, the total area of Borogram Village is to be acquired during the initial stages of the project, as this is where the first part of coal extraction activities are planned[16]. The total land acquired is to be used for two activities; one, the removal of soil of up to 270 meters in order to make pits for the extraction of coal, and two, to build associated establishments for dumping coal and constructing offices, employee quarters and roads. According to the project plans and mine maps presented in the Company's project publications, most of Borogram and the surrounding areas are planned sites for digging pits and dumping coal[17].

In the late 1990s a muddy road, *kacha*, that connected the village to Phulbari Town was developed by Asia Energy to ease the movement of their vehicles during exploration surveys. This new *Paka Road* provided a thirty-minute one-way commute between the Town and the Village by human-paddled three wheelers, rickshaws and vans. Those with bicycles were able to use the road with a slightly quicker result, and the few well-off villagers with motorcycles were able to make an even quicker commute and did so more often to stock up on household needs. Walking commuters avoided taking the longer zigzagging road and were able to make it to Town in roughly forty minutes by travelling through the edges of paddy fields. Phulbari Town is conveniently linked to the capital, and other parts of North and North-west Bengal, by coach and rail services.

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[16] Feasibility study and scheme of development. Submitted to the Government of Bangladesh by Asia Energy (Bangladesh) pty. Ltd, October, 2008

[17] Phulbari coal project: environment and social impact assessment (executive summary). Asia Energy Corporation (Bangladesh) pty. Ltd, 2008

This convenient rail connection was considered a favourable element to the initial settlers of Borogram Village as rail connections meant the prospect of an easy link between their old home and their 'new' village of Borogram. In addition, it allowed for the possibility of attracting more people to the 'new place' during the initial periods of migration. Unfortunately, parts of the road between the Village and Phulbari Town are now scattered with ditches creating significant obstacles for rickshaws, vans and motorcycles. The developed parts of the road that once provided the villagers with smoother faster access to the Town only lasted a couple of years. This quick disintegration of the *Paka* Road has given villagers the sense that, "They [Asia Energy] do nothing for the local people. They built roads for their survey purpose; the survey is finished and the road is also broken-down," (as remarked by one regular commuter).

The image of South Asian villages as separated, 'sealed', and stable from the outside world has long been refuted in scholarly debates. Ron Inden criticised Occidental scholars for portraying South Asian villages as being ancient essences, static and separate[18]. He argues that the realities are "far from embodying simple unchanging essences"[19]. Social elements and agents are more complex and "they make and remake each other through a dialectic process in changing situations"[20]. In the case of Borogram Village, its connectedness can be observed through the presence of various forms of contemporary communication technologies. Mobile phones have become a popular means of communication within the village and beyond. Televisions have been installed in tea stalls and shops to attract customers and in the evening people gather there to watch recreational programs, news and talk shows regarding matters of national and global interest. Radios are frequently seen in the villages where news and other programs can be heard playing around the hour. However, this is not to suggest that the possession of TVs and radios are a common feature in the villages. In fact, the majority of households do not own TVs, mobile phones or radios. Furthermore, the absence of electricity only enables the local village market to run TVs in the evening for a few hours using a generator. Nevertheless, access to these communications helps spread shared knowledge and meanings regarding matters that concern the villagers.

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[18] Inden, 1990
[19] Inden, 1990. p. 2
[20] Inden, 1990 quoted in Gardner, 1995. p. 21

Certain village settings compel this process; mobile phone owners have to gather at the market in the evening to charge their phone batteries. People also come to the market to recharge their Chinese-made torch-lights that can be purchased from Phulbari Town with 100 *taka*, which is equivalent to less than one pound. Other people come to buy their daily food items, such as vegetables, or to watch TV over a cup of tea and snacks. Sellers of small quantities of locally produced vegetables prefer to do so in the village market to avoid the transport costs of travelling to Phulbari Town. Therefore this evening market becomes a meeting point for people from different social categories and a platform for sharing the latest new; including discussions about the mining deal between the Company and the government, information about protest activities, and stories from neighbouring Boropukuria. I became a regular part of this platform during my stay in the village, in part due to the importance of this place for my research and methodological purposes, and partly for the same reasons as the others, to charge my mobile phone and laptop. Through the shared stories, knowledge takes on differential meanings as it undergoes processes of distribution and disbursement throughout the village. This social setting of Borogram Village market acts as a forum for forming shared knowledge of "particular patterns"[21]. Anti-mining protests in Borogram, and the knowledge that stems from the protests, is an example of this.

The establishment of Borogram Village evolved through the migration from a few neighbouring areas in the district of Chapainawabganj in Northern Bangladesh. A group of approximately twenty people, forced by repeated river erosion and consequent land loss, first migrated to the flat forest area around Phulbari Rail Station in, according to some of the members of the group, 1968.

The first group of migrants found a flat forest area in the vicinity of Phulbari Township that promised to be fertile for agricultural activities once the forest was cleared. The forest was gradually cleared into land where crops could be produced and cattle raised. Initial efforts to clear the forest were hindered by interventions from forest officials, as, according to state laws, destruction of such lands were illegal. On several occasions arrest warrants were issued against male members of the group on charges of illegal destruction of natural forest, but the village continued to grow through the migration of families, landless relatives and neighbours. In turn, a large area was gradually cleared

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[21] Gardner, 1995. p. 21

to accommodate a population that now exceeds 2500 individuals living in approximately 500 houses. Over the last four decades the people have asserted their rights to the land through their presence, despite legal action from the forest authority supported by the Government. The first group's initial success in securing land by clearing forest attracted more people from the river-erosion affected areas to migrate to this 'new place'.

Having located an area of flat forest-land in a relatively higher area meant that residents of Borogram needed to develop the means for large quantities of irrigation needed for cultivation. Underground water levels remain low in the village, making irrigation through a petroleum-run shallow-tube well difficult, particularly during the dry season. These difficulties with irrigation resulted in an increased popularity of crops that require lesser water, such as corn. Lower lands are preferred for rice production where shallow-tube wells can be set in a hollow in the ground to reach the water level throughout the production season. Irrigation machines are owned by those villagers who have invested money in setting up mechanisms to meet their own irrigation needs and who simultaneously earn rental income by providing water to other land. Machine owners and their clients are engaged in longer-term seasonal deals based on trust and the faith that both will do their committed part. Rental fees are usually paid after crops are harvested, and a good harvest is contingent on regular and adequate irrigation service from the machine owners. The longer-term relations of trust between these two groups, among many others, feature in the dynamics of Borogram community.

2.2 Building a 'community'

This sub-section describes observations concerning how the boundaries of Borogram as a community are experienced by its members through their shared history of migration from a common area and settlement in a 'new place'. Coming from the district of Chapainawabganj, the Chapai identity was coined to create "community"[22].

The name of the village Borogram translates into English as 'big-village', as it is perceived as being larger in both area and population than other surrounding villages. However, administrative arrangements and the spatial segregation of the electoral units of the government of Bangladesh do not consider Borogram as one village. Formal

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[22] Cohen, 1985

statistical surveys by the Bureau of Statistics of the Government of Bangladesh do not present any statistical information identifying Borogram as one village[23]. The statistics are gathered and presented based on the area administrative units of Bangladesh, according to which the total area of Borogram falls under two different Unions[24]. Despite its formal designations, its residents, and those of the surrounding villages, establish Borogram as a single village or 'community' in their references of daily social interactions. However, this is not to say that Borogram village forms one single 'community' without any internal divisions.

Writers have analysed the 'symbolic' nature of community to suggest that the boundaries and meanings of community are constructed by its member's perceptions of their own community[25]. While approaching Borogram for my ethnographic endeavour, I was neither guided by the formal administrative demarcation of the areas that do not present the existence of Borogram as one village, nor by the public reference of Borogram as one community. As Cohen noted 'community is one of those words…bandied around in ordinary, everyday speech, apparently readily intelligible to speaker and listener, which, when imported into the discourses of social science, however, causes immense difficulty'[26].

Cohen roots his analysis in the idea of what 'community' means to people. In effect, he sets out to reconsider and bring to the forefront the study of the notion of 'community', by exploring how the idea is used, defined, classified, spoken of and lived by those who invest terms and its organic reality with symbolic importance. He contends that the classic use of a theoretical construct of 'community' was to generate reasons for social change and development to structural determinism, whereby a loss of 'community' was considered to have occurred along a continuum. This scaled a notion of community strength, which ranged from a small-scale homogenous folk model of social organisation towards a fragmented 'urban' model, synonymous with a simple/complex duality largely based on a quantitative dimension. In turn, this assumed that social complexity is proportionately related to the scale and number of institutions in the

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[23] See http://www.bbs.gov.bd/Home.aspx the website of the Bureau of Statistic of government of Bangladesh.
[24] Union is the lowest administrative unit of government of Bangladesh. A district consists of some sub-districts and a sub-district consists of some unions.
[25] Cohen (1985) discussed this symbolic nature of community; Also, Cohen, 1987
[26] Cohen, 1985. p. 11

urban situation. This whole discourse is a mythology simply because it 'pays scant regard to the qualitative dimension of social life'[27] and to the perceptions and meaning held by the members regarding their own community.

Cohen argues that a reasonable interpretation of the word's use would seem to imply two related suggestions; that the members of a group have something in common with one another and that the thing held in common distinguishes them in a significant way from the members of other possible groups[28]. Community, thus, implies both similarity and difference. It is a relational idea: the opposition of one community to others or to other social entities. Boundaries of community may be perceived and, as such, they may be seen in very different ways. This is the symbolic aspect of community, or communion, boundary and is fundamental to gaining an appreciation of how people experience communities and communion. Cohen tries to understand 'community' by seeking to capture members' experiences of it. Instead of asking, what does it look like to us? He asks what does it appear to mean to its members? Member's perception of the vitality of their culture, he argues, forms the reality of community[29]. Cohen's work emphasizes belonging and connection, which are significant elements in what is called 'Social Capital', as previously discussed.

Longer-term observations and participatory explorations of daily life helped capture how people experience communities. As previously mentioned, the residents of Borogram share a common migratory history from the district of Chapainawabganj in Northern Bangladesh. The initial flows of migration occurred through the family links and social connections of those first twenty people who arrived in the 'new place'. As such, the earliest residents of Borogram, who established their presence by clearing forest, were all somehow related or known to one another and came from a few neighbouring villages within one sub-district in Chapainawabganj. With time, attracted by the availability of *Khas* (government-owned) land, an increasing number of people migrated to the 'new place' through their secondary and tertiary social connections. In turn, these migrated people attracted their kin, relatives and friends, not only from their own villages, but also from other parts of the district. As a result, the village expanded with people who had migrated largely from three or four pockets of one district in

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[27] Cohen, 1985. p. 28
[28] Cohen, 1985. p. 12
[29] Cohen, 1982, 1985

Chapainawabganj. Their common origin in the Chapainawabganj district assigned them the Chapai identity in the eyes of surrounding villages. This resulted in Borogram being known as Chapai village, and its residents commonly termed Chapai people. The people of Borogram also identify themselves as Chapai people in matters relating to transactions and interactions with other local villages. It is accepted 'truth' that people of the Chapai community are more laborious than other local residents, as they have to work hard to produce crops in the dry and relatively higher previously uncultivated land. The local rickshaw puller driving me to Borogram advised me, "No one in the village spends time being lazy. When small peasants don't have to work on their land between harvesting seasons they go out to the cities to work as wage labourers. That's why Chapai people earn more than us."

Borogram was commonly portrayed as a cohesive group in cases of conflict with other villagers and in protecting their presence on the land. "If someone from the village is harassed by someone from another village the entire village would stand for our people. We, Chapai people, are united and we form one unit," said a Borogram resident. The boundary of Borogram is marked as having the qualities of a community as it is experienced "not only by people on either side, but also by people on the same side"[30].

At another level, the Borogram 'community' is characterised by internal sub-divisions. As the village expanded it soon became difficult to arrange certain social events commonly held for the entire village. Events such as inviting everyone to marriage ceremonies, commonly held as an individual's social obligation, mitigating increasing numbers of social conflict for the village leaders and providing motivation to people living in the corners of the village to contribute to building a mosque or madrasa (religious school), are examples of incidents that created tension and conflict within the village groups. Within this background, several new village leaders, or *'Mondols'/'Dewans'*, were nominated, with the consent of elderly *'Mondols'*, to represent different parts of the village as social arbiters. Now the village households are verbally divided into eight parts and assigned to eight of the newly appointed *Mondols* forming their own community groups and dealing with everyday social matters amongst themselves. Borogram remains an overarching community forum to which

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[30] Cohen, 1985. p. 30

everyone belongs and issues that are not solved within the sub-community are dealt with in an open village court, *Bichar*, involving several *Mondols*.

2.3 Samaj

These sub-communities are often referred to as '*Samaj*' as much as Borogram is. The functioning of *Samaj* appears complex, as it is not simply dependent on the spatial divisions of Borogram; other marks of connection cross cut in the operation of the concept of *Samaj*.

Anxieties derived from the threat of the loss of *Samaj*, along with the good qualities nurtured by its residents, plays a role in the formation of anti-mining sentiments in Borogram; this is discussed elaborately in the next chapter. The discussion is aided by the following exploration into the characteristics of *Samaj* and the context within which it operates in Borogram.

An analysis of how *Samaj* is formed and how it works is not new in Bangladesh. Adnan notes, "A Samaj typically consists of the household belonging to one or more patrilineages with their homesteads in close proximity, led by the most senior or influential patriarchs among them"[31]. Some of the earlier ethnographic attempts in Bangladeshi villages described *Samaj* as a mutual social group which is based on reciprocal obligations[32] that "act[s] out what is morally and ritually meaningful as a community---reinforcing when necessary the normative standards to which all are supposed to adhere"[33]. Bertocci goes deeper into the functioning of *Samaj* in a Bangladeshi village in Comilla district, showing it as a multi-village social group that works as a larger social structure. For him, the multi-village community feeling that is formed through the linkages of kinship and other lines of social connection, such as entitlement to common mosque work, is "a structural unit of larger social groupings, of which the Samaj is one of the most important"[34].

For me, the concept of *Samaj* and its dynamics in a particular context cannot be completely grasped without looking at the particulars of history. Residents of

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[31] Adnan, 2007. p. 187
[32] Arens and Beurden, 1977; Bertocci, 1970
[33] Bertocci, 1996. p. 17
[34] Bertocci, 1972. p. 31

Borogram, as we have discussed, share a common history of migration and settlement in a place away from their original 'home'. Settlement in an unknown locality, which was generally forest-land, was accompanied by possible conflicts with local villagers in the surrounding areas. Early efforts to protect their presence and maintain their rights to the land demanded that they remain united and act as a group in cases of conflict. Borogram Village as a social group was further enhanced by the Chapai identity assigned to everyone in the village. Although their presence and rights to the land has become further established over time, the earlier necessity of acting as a group still remains as they continuously work to protect their perceived rights to the land through their presence. The ability to work together in cases of conflict with surrounding local villagers employs a stronger strategy to protect their presence. In this context, the idea of a Borogram *Samaj* comes into operation as a solidarity group. Borogram is located in close proximity to other villages and its residents have occasional social interactions with the local villagers. Nevertheless, the particular historical realities of Borogram mean there is no multi-village *Samaj* that involves both Chapai and non-Chapai villages. Rather, the idea of Borogram *Samaj* embodies a 'separateness' from surrounding villages, despite the presence of interactions that formed the basis of multi-village *Samaj* in the cases presented by Bertocci.

The structure of a *Samaj* has some organisational features that clarify its functioning. Leaders of the village called *Mondols*, or *Dewanis*, encompass the roles and functions that create a *Samaj*. What makes one a *Mondol* is also contingent on the specificities of the context. I found some variations from some earlier ethnographic observations in this regard. For example, Jansen observed the leaders of a *Samaj*, *Matbars*, as it was called in his case, are those who are economically well-off and are often the product of inherited leadership[35]. Both Bertocci and Jansen found lineage to be significant for becoming a leader of *Samaj*[36]. In addition, both observed that a combination of better economic conditions and membership to a lineage established as one of higher status determines, to a variable extent, the qualities of a *Samaj* leader. In some cases, hereditary members of a particular lineage historically regarded as having a high status enjoy the status of *Samaj* leader despite having a degraded economic condition. In cases presented by Bertocci and Jansen, *Samaj* leaders are generally qualified through

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[35] Jansen, 1986. p. 87

their possession of a wealthier economic status and/or membership to particular lineages or high status 'titles' where the former often results in the latter[37].

Leadership of *Samaj* in Borogram was determined by social realities and accompanied by a history of migration and settlement in a new land. The initial group of twenty people who migrated to this 'new place' were led by one individual called Rahim[38] who had previously visited the area while trading jewellery. Attracted by the availability of unoccupied government-owned land and its convenient communication lines between the old and 'new place', Rahim motivated some of the other affected villagers to migrate to the 'new place' and acquire available land. Rahim travelled to different places for his petty trading, which gave him exposure to the world outside the village. The group of twenty people were confident in Rahim's knowledge and followed him to the 'new place' where they built their temporary houses and cleared their area of flat forest-land. To retain their presence on the land, the group engaged in negotiations with forest officials using a variety of methods, including bribery. Through his previous experiences of travelling to the cities, Rahim had knowledge of the location of government offices. He promised the group he would manage official matters using a group fund created to meet the required expenses. As a result of his experience, Rahim fell into the role of leader and the people followed him. This was despite his education and economic condition not being any better than those who had migrated with him. Neither heritage nor lineage played any role in differentiating social positions in the newly established village. Rahim's role in a conjuncture of landlessness, migration and insecurity in the 'new place' earned him the status of *Mondol*, or *Dewani*, of *Samaj*- soon he was called Rahim Dewani.

Whilst this is the story of the first generation of migrants to Borogram; the social realities of later periods demanded some reforms in the structure of *Samaj*. As previously mentioned, the village expanded over time, which brought the problem of observing social obligations and mitigating conflict within the context of an increasingly large village spread over one thousand acres. *Samaj* is expressed through certain social and religious rituals and ceremonies where everyone has an obligation to subscribe to the norms of the social event. For example, an individual father has to

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[37] Jansen, 1986; Bertocci, 1972
[38] Not his real name

invite all the members of his *Samaj* to the marriage ceremony of his daughter or son. Conflict between members of a *Samaj* is to be mitigated through the judgment of the *Mondol*. Everyone has to contribute, according to an individual's economic ability, to the establishment and maintenance of certain religious establishments such as the Mosque and Madrasa. The observation of these obligations and norms within the context of an expanded village with a large population became problematic for one *Mondol* to oversee. During the 1990s the senior members of Borogram conferred with representatives from different corners of the village on numerous occasions to address this matter; consequently the village was clustered into six *Samaj*, each with their own *Mondol*. This new group of *Mondols* mostly came from the younger generation who had migrated to Borogram with their parents as children. Though none of the new *Mondols* came from what would be considered poor families, it would be misleading to see their relatively wealthier condition as a determinant of their leadership. In fact, most of them did not come from the wealthiest families in the village, and none of them subscribe to any wealthier lineage. Instead, other qualities, such as a history of involvement and effort in *Samaj* affairs, a history of willingness to spend time on community initiatives, of mobilising money for the maintenance of the local mosque, the knowledge and skills to provide judgment in conflict management, and a reputation of impartiality, played a role in determining the new *Mondols*. Although a relatively well-off condition was a feature of each of them, which enabled them to channel their efforts towards community affairs as opposed to spending all of their time engaging in livelihood activities, a better economic condition was not necessarily the sole determinant of their leadership. This is evident in the fact that some of the wealthiest individuals, such as those who own the largest amounts of land, did not become *Mondols*. Rather than lineage and economic condition becoming criterion of *Samaj* leadership, roles played by individuals in particular realities shape the qualities of a *Mondol.* Sometimes new kinds of *Samaj* leaders emerge through experiences of specific events. The protest movement against the proposed mining and the leadership of these protests in the village is one example of this.

The role of a *Samaj* can be seen in two broad aspects, enabling functions and restricting functions. Perceptions of *Samaj* depend on the idea of solidarity amongst its members, which enables them to benefit from aspects of cohesiveness. Elements of what is called 'social capital', such as social connections, relations of trust and faith built through

longer-term interactions, and aspects of patron-client relations, are the enabling aspects of a *Samaj*. *Samaj* also works as a cognitive idea through which traditional, social and religious norms are administered by restricting individuals from breaking the norms.

Bichar is the most important element of the restricting aspect of a *Samaj*. *Bichar* is a system of judging any particular misdeed, act of violence, or conflict between two individuals, households or groups, by setting up a village court led by the *Mondol* and involving other members of *Samaj*. The court hears a case and the *Mondol*, in collaboration with other members of *Samaj*, delivers a verdict to mitigate the conflict or to punish a guilty party. Any member of *Samaj* can ask for *Bichar* if he/she is a victim of conflict and/or violence, and it is the duty of the members of a *Samaj* to arrange for *Bichar* with the leadership of the *Mondol*. In this sense, *Bichar* is enabling or empowering for a victim. Occasionally individuals are brought to *Bichar* forcefully in cases where there has been a violation of religious and/or social norms, such as adultery. Objectives of the *Bichar* system are usually mediatory so that events of perceived misdeeds are mitigated internally and the parties involved can remain integrated in the *Samaj*. To reach mediation, judgments are brought against the guilty, and punishments can involve public verbal harassment, minor physical punishments, such as slapping, and/or monetary penalties to be paid to the victims. Issues that are not solved internally in the *Bichar* of newly formed small *Samajs*, and that require wider attention, are passed through to a broader *Bichar* involving other *Mondols* and representatives of the entirety of Borogram village. *Bichar* as a village institution is an inseparable element of the idea of *Samaj* and acts as a platform for the connection between small *Samajs* in Borogram.

This connection between small *Samajs* exists in various lines of social interaction and in the sense of belonging to a common Chapai identity. One of the factors that defined the clustering of households in the formation of new *Samajs* was the location of people's old homes in Chapainawabganj district. Though not obvious, there already exists a clustering of households in Borogram according to the location the migrants originally came from. While people from Shibganj sub-district tend to live in one pocket of Borogram, people from a neighbouring sub-district live in another. This clustering of households according to people's original homes historically developed during the process of gradual migration through family and other links. Migrants

tended to build homes and live close to their friends and relatives who had migrated earlier, thus, avoiding being alone in a new place. Some people simply built their houses where they found people from their original villages or places closest to their original home. The close proximity to the original home was used as a reference for building household clusters and developing groups in the new place. Those household groups already existing in certain pockets of Borogram were the determinants of the marking of small *Samajs*. It is this vagueness in the markers of new *Samaj* that makes them pervasive. Though location of original home played an important role in determining the positions of new homes, some other considerations also directed the spread of households. For example, the availability of agricultural land was the most important determinant of the site of new houses. People preferred to live in close proximity to their agricultural lands in order to have a better ability to monitor their production and irrigation processes. The first settlers in Borogram had some agricultural land around their houses. This pattern evolved through the process necessary for clearing forest in order to make it arable land, which required living near the land in order to protect crops and land rights. For these reasons, when agricultural land was unavailable close to their primary associates, the migrants that followed the early settlers built their houses and dispersed throughout different pockets of Borogram. A larger amount of available land also took people to different parts the village. As the early settlers had already occupied the larger pieces of land, later migrants settled wherever they found a piece of land for their homestead. As such, although there is a general tendency to live in clusters based on associations from their previous village, the household distribution pattern is not necessarily determined by this. Nevertheless, the primary factor in the making of new *Samajs* was the existing cluster of households, which are not necessarily made of people from a common *desher bari*, original home.

In matters concerning *Samaj*, people often associate themselves with those who have come from their village or who they are related to, even though they now belong to a different *Samaj*. *Bichar* is the most visible element of *Samaj* and does not show any rigid territorial boundary. All members living in a particular cluster are considered members of a *Samaj*. However, in the case of *Bichar*, people who are living in different clusters and who are previously known to the majority of the organising cluster, or who migrated from a common area, would also be invited to participate, as they are

considered a member of that *Samaj*. A person living in a different household cluster would always be considered as part of the *Samaj* home to the majority of his kin. In this way, individuals sometime possess membership of multiple *Samajs*.

Religious institutions, such as Mosques and Madrasas, are an important part of a *Samaj* as they signify religious duties and foster religious education. Members of a particular *Samaj* will mobilise funds to establish a mosque thereby promoting member and *Samaj* visibility. For example, members of a particular *Samaj* will be charged a particular amount of money, in cash or kind, for the establishment of a mosque. The amount is fixed by the *Mondol* according to the observed economic condition of that household. It then becomes a moral obligation for the household to pay the amount subscribed to the *Samaj* and its religious institution. People who are not considered part of that particular *Samaj* are not obliged to contribute to building that particular mosque. This is how new mosques were built by the newly formed *Samajs*.

However, not all of the six new *Samajs* have been able to build their own mosques due to the small number of households in some of the clusters, in conjunction with a crisis of collective funds. Thus, more than one *Samaj* share mosques, as they are, in religious principle, open to all. People who regularly go to a particular mosque become members of associations built around mosque-based activities, such as the organisation of evening prayer sessions. It becomes a moral duty for the members of these associations to contribute in order to meet small expenses involved, such as buying sweets for participants, in organising these sessions. This moral duty often extends to contributing to the installation of a tube-well or the expansion, or further development, of the mosque. This kind of involvement with mosque-based activities brings the members of different *Samaj* together, including when it is necessary to deal with individuals unwilling to contribute to the development and maintenance of the mosque. In these aspects the boundaries between *Samajs* become blurred. This is further evidenced by the people's subscription to a common mosque for the entire village Borogram. Aside from the presence of mosques in pockets of the village, there is a mosque at the village entrance called Borogram Mosque. This was built with brick and concrete through the contributions of people from all parts of the village. The mosque was conveniently built just beside the local market so that people from all parts who gather in the market in the evening could attend evening prayers. Like Borogram local market, the mosque is also

a platform for social interaction between different groups where the idea of an overarching Chapai *Samaj* strengthens.

The leadership of *Samaj* and the judgment provided in *Bichar* does not always go unchallenged. A *Mondol* has to legitimise his position by gaining acceptance as a leader. Judgment provided in *Bichar* has to be accepted as fair by the people. This tends to occur through discussions involving senior members and other interested parties. This does not, however, ensure an unchallenged quality and undisputed jurisdiction of *Mondols*. *Mondols* do not necessarily possess links to high status lineages or wealth, thus, they do not emerge from any historical relations of hierarchy. Instead, their role as leader requires time and commitment to *Samaj* activities, and their leadership is sometimes refuted. One of the wealthiest individuals in Borogram, who is believed to possess the largest amount of land in the village, acquired over time through hard work clearing forest-land with the assistance of his family, lamented, "Generally bekar (people without business) were made Mondols. They have enough lazy time to give all those Samaj activities. I am busy person; I can't go for all these things". Other well-off people who did not become *Mondol* expressed resentment towards the quality of the *Mondols*; "I am the Mondol of my own house. I don't get to go to these Bichars any more. They don't call me either. Why should they? I don't go to Phulbari town; I don't go outside; I can't read or write. They have new young people who always go to towns and probably know better than us. They don't have to respect me any more. Let them run their Samaj. I don't have to go there. I am happy to be Mondol of my own household," stated Sharif Bepari, resident of Borogram.

Disapproval of Mondols is often expressed in non-participation or the overtaking of the *Bichar* system in dealing with social or family conflicts. Instead of requesting a formal *Bichar* those who disapprove of the Mondols seek help in dealing with social and family conflicts from their kin and relatives in the village. Additionally, people passively reject the decisions or judgment provided in *Bichar*. Individuals suspicious of the impartiality of the *Mondol* and his supporters often disobey any judgment made against themselves and will instead bring the matter to the attention of other *Mondols* and their links with other *Samajs*. Sometimes they will take the matter even further, for the consideration of an elected member of the Union *parishad*, the lowest tier of the local government. These issues are then dealt with within the larger forum of Borogram

Samaj involving all the *Mondols*, senior residents, people regarded as knowledgeable for their education or exposure to outside world, and others who are interested. *Samaj* operates through the process of both subscription and periodic denial of people to specific events and elements that shape it.

2.4 Social hierarchy and power

In order to better understand the social realities in Borogram I had to trace the source of hierarchy and power in Borogram. Contrary to some earlier observations, my research shows that rather than lineage or previous high status of homesteads, histories and realities of settling in a 'new place' demanded other qualities in determining social leadership. In a changing scenario people assert certain kinds of power through the acquisition of alternate livelihoods, such as agricultural technology, which they then use to renegotiate their position within social hierarchies. In this context, as we will see, it becomes difficult to identify one particular group as uniformly powerless or absolutely controlling.

Some early attempts to present rural Bangladesh as an undifferentiated peasant society were later criticised by a more insightful analysis that uncovered a pre-occupation with homogeneity and bias to a particular region's agro-economic data attached with those attempts[39]. Driven by the need for policy formulation for rural development, most of the attempts to generate aggregate data about landholding and tenure avoided the variations in different regions, and the differences in the histories of social and land relations through which they pressed for a uniform landholding picture[40]. This continued in the early official surveys of an independent Bangladesh (1977-78) conducted by the Bureau of Statistics of Government of Bangladesh with the financial and technical cooperation of USAID where regional breakdown of land occupancy data was absent[41]. Wood finds that agro-economic studies in the densely populated and fertile region of Comilla, conducted by the Bangladesh Academy for Rural Development (BARD), became the popular reference for much of these generalisations in early rural studies. These findings of Comilla district "formed the basis of

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[39] See, Wood, 1981

[40] Sources are illustrated in Khan, 1977

[41] Government of Bangladesh. Land occupancy survey (Bureau of Statistics and USAID), 1977; Similar argument was made by Wood, 1981

extrapolations for Bangladesh as a whole, providing an image of an homogenous agrarian structure described in terms of small holding farmers"[42].

If rural Bangladesh is not merely an undifferentiated peasant society, then to what extent does the social differentiation take the nature of social class? This question provoked intense discussion among scholars and political activists in Bangladesh. Looking at the large body of debate around the relevance of social class in analysing rural socio-economic dynamics in Bangladesh, I intend to present the principal premises of their arguments to set the background as we move into a discussion about the dynamics of social conditions in Borogram Village. I do not intend to present yet another elaborate discussion about these arguments, but a brief introduction to the main themes. Scholars such as Jahangir and Rahman, throughout their entire academic and scholarly careers, argued that without the concept of social class it would not be possible to understand rural relations in Bangladesh[43]. Though rural masses, as a class, remain immobilised, they form a group aware of the exploitations directed towards them by the local and non-local influential groups, the local rich, and their 'corruptive practices'[44]. Class relations in rural communities appear 'less real' to outsiders as the rural rich intimidate the masses through their control over the land and local institutions and the caricature of the state's development policies hide the repressive situation[45].

Some of the early anthropological works on the Bangladeshi rural structure have suggested that the idea of economic class is a 'blunt' instrument to understand the actual dynamics of social relations as it becomes insufficient to capture the 'structural fragmentation' that make up rural society in Bangladesh[46]. Peter Bertocci, for example, proposed viewing the social differentiation in rural Bangladesh in terms of stratification, i.e. categories of income, status and wealth, all of which determine social position. Bertocci's analysis is based on a distinction between the economic basis of social structure (class) and status, a distinction proposed by Max Weber, through which he "correlate[d] economic indicators of class with non-economic, culturally significant markers of relative prestige or social rank"[47]. Bertocci explains his conceptual and

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[42] Wood, 1981. p. 3; Also See, Van Schendel, 1976; Blair, 1974
[43] Jahangir, 1979, 1990; Rahman, 1974
[44] Jahangir, 1990. p. 1
[45] Jahangir, 1990
[46] Bertocci, 1970; Jansen, 1987
[47] Bertocci, 1979. p. 15

empirical position by referring to Weber, "Class distinctions are linked in the most varied ways with status distinctions. Property as such is not always recognised as a status qualification, but in the long run it is, and with extraordinary regularity.[48]" In two Bangladeshi villages, Bertocci found the relevance of this statement where class, wealth, power and status all move upward and downward through an interlinked process. Accumulation of land forms the basis of wealth, and key base for power, that goes through a regular pattern of rise and fall depending on various factors, such as seasonal adversity and the ability to accumulate money through lending activities. The upward and downward movement of wealth is accompanied by the assignment of status to a particular household, as is captured in this proverb, "*Last year I was a jolaha (weaver), this year I have become sheikh, and if next year's crops are good, I shall be syed*"[49], where *jolaha*, *sheikh* and *sayed* are progressively higher status titles. On the other hand, an economically degraded household, who previously belonged to higher status titles, are still readily recognised by the people as 'real', *ashol*, high status people and, thus, may enjoy the status of an arbiter. Alternatively, those who newly acquire an increased status title are often categorised as 'so-called', *dak*[50]. Other literature maintains Bertocci's analysis arguing that affiliations of kinship and class cross-cut, and patron-client relations form a kind of 'vertical' solidarity that undermines the possibilities of solidarities on horizontal class lines[51]. For these writers, rural social relations in Bangladesh are structurally fragmented in a framework of status that "allows for the possibility of individual households occupying asymmetrical positions in different hierarchies – economic, lineage, ritual, education[52]."

In explaining the social relations of rural Bangladesh, Geoffrey Wood, who has had a long engagement with research and writings on Bangladesh, brings in a different analysis than the one presented by Bertocci. Wood differs first from the Webarian pre-occupation with the concept of Bertocci's structural fragmentation that prohibits any necessity of economic class position; and second, he found the perception of Marxian class in Bertocci's analysis superficial as it assumed that a class position always and inevitably corresponds to a subjective awareness, or consciousness, of their exploited

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[48] Bertocci, 1972. p. 34
[49] Bertocci, 1972. p. 48
[50] Bertocci, 1972. p. 49
[51] See Jansen, 1986. p. 77
[52] Wood, 1981. p. 4

condition. However, Wood maintained that the Marxian class concept was still relevant in understanding Bangladeshi rural society by arguing that class, as a concept, did not necessarily involve a state of collective action or consciousness that features in the conditions of more developed capitalism. He proposed looking for different forms and expressions of class relations in different regions of Bangladesh without taking consciousness and collective action as a necessary condition of class. In that way, class becomes a legitimate concept in understanding structural fragmentation, and this vertical relation becomes the form of class relations in specific realities, not an alternative. Considering the specific history of Bangladesh that constrained the development and proliferation of capital in the agricultural sector, Wood draws attention to the role of "unproductive capital" in understanding the realms of social relations. He observes that the colonial domination of West Pakistan during the Pakistan period restricted the capital accumulation process in East Pakistan, present Bangladesh, which equally defied the rural areas to draw capital in agricultural production. Other forms of unproductive capital, such as usurious money lending, different forms of land mortgages and leasing, sharecropping without capital investment, and shops and petty trading, characterised the history of rural economy. Social relations determined by these forms of capital feature in the rural social structure of Bangladesh. As Wood does not totally deny the presence of structural fragmentation or vertical solidarities, some later observations on the specific conditions of rural Bangladesh found that patron-client type solidarities are more prevalent than the solidarities that build along the lines of economic class[53]. "Adaptation to, strategies for, coping with specific class position"[54] are determined by the particularities of vertical connectedness.

The other difference between the earlier and later analyses of agrarian relations in Bangladesh is that the former, in most cases, interpreted the social politics in terms of a rigid structure where the poor were caught in a varying extent within the power 'net' of the rural elite and where power was inflexibly deduced to the accumulation of, and control over, land. For example, Arens and Van Beurden, Jahangir, and Hartman and Boyce all consistently presented the agrarian structure in a rigid sense where the poor were always caught in the power of rural elite derived from unequal land ownership

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[53] Gardner, 1995. p. 135; Rozario, 1992. p. 50; Jansen, 1987. p. 300
[54] Rozario. 1992. p. 50

and accompanying 'pervasive' patron-client relations[55]. While not disputing the evident presence of unequal and constraining land ownership patterns, and the obvious importance of this to analyse the local structure of relations, some later analyses indicated the emergence of alternative means for the rural player to negotiate within the established unequal social structure, thus, making the structure more flexible. "Agricultural reformation" initiatives in some rural areas during the 1980s and 1990s brought new opportunities for some to take on new livelihood strategies in a traditional land-based agricultural setting, as noted by Wood[56]. The range of new technologies, such as shallow tube-well irrigation, provided the means for some villagers to embark on alternative income sources thereby negotiating their dependency on land-based relations[57].

Lewis[58], in the same line of analysis, showed how these new technologies often brought the rural poor, or the less powerful, into social and economic roles that challenged the land-based social relations. New opportunities were accompanied by new 'rural roles and transactions' that were injected into the processes of broader agrarian change towards a non-static social structure[59]. Bode[60] presented evidence of this changing nature of the rural rich. He argues that from the 1980s onwards land is not the only defining factor in the composition of rural elite; instead a new wave of privatised venture for agricultural technologies took to the scene in the process of the accumulation of wealth creating a new group of rural business households. The socio-political relations of villages are renegotiated by the introduction of these new households who involve themselves in the realms of political actions and networks, and matters involving philanthropic value. Some studies search for possibilities of solidarities between the elites and poor, pointing at the inadequacy of some of the earlier analyses to give attention to the conditions under which cooperation and collectivity occurs. Hossain[61] invites exploration into this process "under which solidarity with poor become possible".

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[55] Lewis and Hossain. 2008. p. 24; Also, Arens and Van Beurden, 1977; Jahangir 1982; Hartman and Boyce, 1983
[56] Wood, 1999
[57] See case presented by Wood, 1999. pp. 303-328
[58] Lewis, 1996, 1999
[59] Lewis, 1991; Lewis, 1996
[60] Bode, 2002 cited in Lewis and Hossain, 2008. p. 25
[61] Hossain, 2004

The later analyses of the rural hierarchy as being more diverse and multi-linear have provided me with significant insights into the exploratory efforts in Borogram. The history of land loss, subsequent migration, and the settling of a 'new place', particularly influenced the functioning of certain elements of the social structure, as is discussed in the previous section. These realities also affected aspects of the social hierarchy. In recalling his experiences of migration, one elderly resident of the village stated, "None of the people who were not affected by the river migrated here. Why would they? Its only us who lost everything came to this place. Most of us came here empty handed". This testimony provides a picture of the economic condition of those early residents of the village. Indeed, it is a generally established fact that the people who migrated to this 'new place' were either poor or plunged into poverty as a result of land loss. People whose land or livelihood were not shattered and had adequate means to make a living did not leave their homes; as such, the village was primarily established by people in a poor economic condition. This situation conditioned the limits of the roles of economic indicators in the establishment of hierarchical relations that express differential power and status, at least in the early days of settlement. A sense of solidarity between these people, who shared the loss of their livelihood, was emphasised in the protection of their presence in this 'new place' and their rights to the land. Apparent similarities in the economic situations of the people who established the village hindered the development of an economic-based social hierarchy in early days of the village. However, the economics of the village changed with time as people embarked on various livelihood initiatives and as the village expanded to accommodate an increased number of river-affected poor people. The motivation for migrating to this place was the availability of land, as was repeatedly mentioned during my stay in the village; "We didn't know this place; we were hesitant to move to an unknown place, but we came here because of the possibility of having some land so that we could change our condition," noted an early settler.

People aspired to change their condition by acquiring agricultural land through clearing forests. A notion of landownership based on longer-term presence on the cleared forest-land emerged, which will be discussed further in the next chapter. Rather than wealth the amount obtained was dependent on a particular household's workforce. Households with greater numbers of male members had a greater workforce and were therefore able to gradually clear larger forest area and produce more crops. Hard working individuals

were better equipped to establish their rights on larger amounts of land, as they were able to clear and cultivate larger areas. As a result, some households acquired more land than others and the crops produced there enhanced their ability to buy more land, thus, gradually improving their economic condition. Eventually landownership and disparities in economic abilities became a feature of Borogram. Households who had previously been poor soon possessed large amounts of land and became some of the biggest landholders in the village. While the possession of land was accompanied by power derived from associate premises based on land relations and the ability to employ wage labour, such as patron-client(ism), this did not automatically transform into power attached to social leadership. The functioning of *Samaj* and its leadership pattern, as discussed earlier, is one example of this. A range of factors has interfered with the structure of hierarchy and power relations.

Though acquisition of land initially formed the basis of differential wealth and associated power, other forms of livelihood ventures later emerged bringing alternate means to assert power based on new lines of social relations. Observations on agricultural technologies and the associated social relations present in Borogram Village exemplify how different socio-economic groups express various types of power. Similar to the observations presented by Wood and Lewis on rural societies of Bangladesh, Borogram shows the presence of agri-technology based ventures that necessitate particular social relations. As previously mentioned, the village is located on a relatively higher land that requires a greater amount of irrigation for farming.

Technologies for irrigation thus play an important role in the production process. If a landowner does not gain access to one of the shallow irrigation machines during the dry season his land will simply go uncultivated. Those with large land holdings accumulate surplus money from the sale of their crops; this is then invested in the installation of irrigation machines used primarily to irrigate their own land. Some others install such machines as a business venture, providing irrigation services to peasants with small pieces of land and to those whose land is too far from the landowner's own machines. This second group of machine owners do not come from the surplus land-owning group, rather they come from the group of medium or small landowners who mobilise money with the help of loans from credit service providers (NGOs). To overcome the issue of obtaining the initial capital required, two or three

people form a small group to install a machine with joint ownership. Relations between machine-owners and water-receivers are generally long-term relationships with seasonal agreements for payment and services. In addition, because a piece of land needs to be covered by a machine installed within a close proximity in order to be connected to the water channel and reduce water loss, certain lands are covered by certain machine owners for longer terms. This forms a basis of dependency for the water-receivers, as their access to water is fundamental to production, and, therefore, to their livelihood. In the process, machine owners acquire power to control the dimensions of the machine-owner - water-receiver relation. Allowing the exemption or delay of payment in the cases of crop loss due to seasonal calamities is subject to the machine-owners. The newly acquired power of the machine-owner's to control the irrigation process is also articulated in their transactions with more affluent landowners who require irrigation services due to the location of their land. The machine-owners accumulate the money they have earned from their irrigation services to pay back any loans borrowed for their initial investment, as well as to strengthen their economic ability and invest in larger agricultural technologies, such as a tiller or mini-tractor.

> **The story of Zakir Hossain**[62] of Borogram illustrates how lines of social relations emerge around irrigation technologies. Zakir is his father's only son. He was only two when his father migrated to Borogram some forty years ago. Since his father was the only male in the family, he was unable to acquire much land, as clearing forest and farming require a workforce. His family possess a small amount of land close to his house where his father produces rice and vegetables for their own consumption. After meeting the food demands of the family there is hardly any surplus. Zakir was unable to go to school because he had to work with his father on their land. Ten years ago Zakir married and within three years he became the father of a girl and boy. The amount of land they possessed was never enough to make a living and after getting married and having children his situation worsened.
>
> To add to his struggles he had to give a portion of their produce as payment for the irrigation service they get during the dry season. The irrigation service, provided by a wealthy neighbour, was crucial for their food production because,

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[62] Not his real name

without adequate water during the dry season, their crops failed. In an incident a few years ago, the machine owner stopped providing water in the middle of the dry season after Zakir had a conflict with him over the payment. Zakir managed to get water from another machine, but with much higher payments due to the distance. After giving over the payment portion of their produce Zakir's family was left without much for the rest of the year. Zakir was frustrated; he had to do something to overcome this situation. He always thought of buying an irrigation machine so that he could irrigate their land and earn extra money providing irrigation services to others, like his wealthy neighbour, but he never had surplus money to buy a machine. One of his friends in the village spoke about jointly buying a machine with a loan from Proshika, an NGO that provided a credit facility in the village. Zakir was unsure about taking a loan from this NGO because he was afraid of falling into debt. However, he was desperate to buy a machine as he no longer wanted to get water from another machine and wanted to try his luck to see if he could make a profit. He thought, since others in the village were making a good profit from the machine, why couldn't he? He requested that his father sell his four cows, used to till the land, and give him the money to buy a machine jointly with his friend who would take loan from Proshika. He promised his father that he would hire a tiller to till the land with profit he gets from investing in the machine.

He managed to get twelve thousand taka for selling the cows and installed a machine which they used to irrigate their own land, as well as for providing water services to others at a cost, including to Rahman Ali, one of the wealthier individuals in the village. Rahman Ali's land was previously left uncultivated due to its distance from Rahman's own irrigation system, but this land is located close to Zakir's machine and thus conveniently irrigated. Rahman is now dependent of Zakir's machine to be able to farm these lands.

Control over irrigation technologies, as illustrated in Zakir's story, results in the power to influence the relations built around them. Alternate means of livelihood opportunities, such as agricultural technology, signifies the dispersed nature of power in the social relations of Borogram.

Though a portion of individuals from a lower/middle economic category benefited from alternate livelihood strategies provided by investment in agricultural technology, the poorer individuals, such as agricultural labourers, did not seem to own these technologies. While there were a few cases where poor people joined together to install a machine, these need to be considered within the context of the general trend, as several factors influence poorer peoples ability to own agricultural technology. Those who make their living primarily as agricultural labourers go to the cities to work during the periods between harvesting seasons when there is a scarcity of work in the village. Phulbari Town is the closest place to find work without having to migrate from the village, allowing simultaneous cultivation of any land they may have. Through their experiences of periodic work in the town, they build relations with town people, which they then use to access facilities provided by the machine dealers to the buyers. For example, a person who works in a dealer's shop as a labourer builds upon that relation to acquire a machine partially on loan. Similarly, someone who works periodically as a construction labourer in the town can use the recommendation of his friend who works for the dealer's shop to get a machine on partial loan. The isolated incidences of irrigation machines installed by a group of peasants or agricultural labourers in Borogram were the result of the successful use of these kinds of links. Generally, in Borogram, the ownership of agricultural technology is beyond the ability of poor peasants whose access to water remains dependent on the machines installed by a few emerging agri-entrepreneurs.

However, this does not mean that these new entrepreneurs posses such control and power over the production process that small producers become passive agents. Rather, because these are often business ventures on loans, a good number of clients, or water-receivers, are essential for the success of the venture. A new machine installed nearby makes the situation highly competitive for machine-owners as they both try to attract as many as clients as possible. In these situations, the water-receivers gain power, as it is they who determine their preferences for a particular service-provider, thereby lessening their dependency on a particular machine and its owner. This is why affluent machine-owners do not form a class-type solidarity group, as they often must compete with one another in providing irrigation services.

2.5 Marriage relations

Other village ethnographies in Bangladesh have elaborately described the role of lineage and status of the homestead, *bongsho*, and patrilineal kin groups, *gusti*, as important qualities in marriage relations[63]. As discussed earlier, historically, lineage and previous homestead status do not play a main role in the arrangements of differential social status in Borogram as the realities of migrating to a 'new place' introduced other influencing factors in this regard. Migration also fragmented kin groups and people had to rebuild their kin relations through marriage, in the absence of their kin members. The qualities of parties involved in marriage relations are considered on the basis of re-built socio-economic status. Rather than repeating the roles of different status as the qualities of marriage, I intend to present a changing scenario of marriage relations in Borogram.

'Why do you think I brought a bride for my sons from outside? People never used to do that. Now it's becoming common. Do you know why?' Kabir Bepari[64], a senior resident of the village, rhetorically asked this question, not expecting an answer from an outsider with little or no knowledge of the 'hidden' realms in village social relations. He went on to explain that marriage in Borogram was traditionally arranged within the Chapai community. This was because of perceived socio-cultural differences between the migrated Chapai people and local people, who are seen as non-compliant for marriage relations. Migrated Chapai people are seen as coming from a different culture with cultural differences, such as accents and food preparation methods. For example, it was generally acknowledged that Chapai people used a greater amount of chillies in their curries and food when compared to those of the local people. Differences in dialects made the Chapai people unfamiliar to the locals. Also, because they migrated from a different district and settled on land considered government-owned, Chapai people were seen as temporary in the area and, thus, not suitable for marriage. Having lived in the area for decades, Chapai people have now established their presence on the land and engaged in various social interactions with the local people, such as sharing the same mosque or gathering at a common *hat*, village market. In some cases, other

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[63] Jansen, 1986; Bertocci, 1971
[64] Not his real name.

realities stimulated longer-term social relations such as marriage; this is exemplified in the case of Kabir Bepari.

Like many others, Kabir Bepari migrated to Borogram after losing his land and home to the river. Before being affected by the river, he had owned just enough agricultural land to make a living. However, after migrating to Borogram, he, assisted by the labour of his sons, gradually became one of the largest landholders in the village. Kabir Bepari and his three sons invested all of their efforts and time into the maintenance and cultivation of their land, and, as a result, illiterate Kabir was unable to send his sons to the schools located in Phulbari Town. This became problematic for Kabir and his sons, as communication with city offices was often required in dealing with the complexities of maintaining possession of the land. For example, access to land offices is vital in the case of any land ownership dispute and communication with the electricity department is essential for connecting an irrigation machine to an electricity line. With little or no knowledge about these offices, or as to how things worked, Kabir Bepari looked to gain relatives who could provide his family with help and suggestions in dealing these matters. In pursuit of this strategy, Bepari decided to make relatives out of the local people and/or people of Phulbari in order to use their knowledge of town affairs and their local connections. As a well-off land owner Kabir acquired a higher economic status, which enabled him to arrange his son's marriages with brides from local households. These changing marriage patterns are an expression of the people of Borogram's continuing efforts to strengthen their presence. Marriage relations with local people are seen as a strategy to expand social networks and strengthen social relations that can be used to negotiate difficulties.

Conclusion

The discussion in this chapter has focused on some of the salient features of social relations in Borogram. I have discussed how people, forced by the river erosions and subsequent land loss from another northern district of Bangladesh, migrated to the new place and established their 'new' village. The residents of Borogram were popularly known as the Chapai people in the surrounding village as they came from the Chapainawabganj district. Migrating from the same district and the shared Chapai identity formed the basis of building a 'community', which the people Borogram called

the Chapai *Samaj*. The essence of Samaj is the collective membership of the community. It works as a cognitive idea with its enabling and restricting functions. While the functioning of Samaj depends on the mutual cooperation and the relations of trust and faith, it also work as a cognitive idea to restrict people from breaking traditional, social and religious norms. Social events such as Bichar are administered in cases of a breach of the norms or in mitigating social conflicts. The social institutions, such as the Mosque, maintain social networks. Despite internal divisions of various kinds, people of Borogram form a social network in the form of the Chapai Samaj. Social networks of this kind are emphasized in discussions of social capital in rural Bangladesh[65]. In these discussions, the multi-transactional ties that feature in the 'communities' have been connected to the discourse of social capital. As they suggest, social capital works around various lines of 'personalised networks'[66], a feature of Chapai Samaj.

The social hierarchies in Borogram are diverse and multi-linear in that no particular group possesses absolute power over the others. Rather then lineage or wealth, social leadership is determined by other factors, such as knowledge about the out side world or the role played and time committed by one to Samaj activities. The particular history of Borogram means that the people who migrated to the 'new place' came, as stated by one elderly resident, 'empty handed'. The degree of the workforce of a family to clear forest land made a difference in the amount of land accumulated by that family, which resulted in differential wealth and associated power. People also acquired alternate means of livelihood, such as irrigation technology, to assert power based on new lines of social relations. Within the multiple lines of social relations people assert certain amounts of power from their own position. Marriage relations are an example of how people extend their social networks. The threat of displacement from the mining company adds value to the importance of social relations; this is discussed further in the next chapter.

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[65] Wood, 2004, 2005
[66] Wood, 2004

Chapter Six

Part One

Rootedness, place and Social Politics

Outline

Following the last chapter's explanation of the social features and history of Borogram, Part One of this chapter deals with the socio-political complexities that are attached to the notion of resistance in the village. The first section discusses how patterns and local notions of land ownership play a significant role in forming denials to proposals of displacement as a result of the development plan of the mine. The second section presents ethnographic evidence that shows how some 'inner'[1] aspects of everyday social relations and unexpressed anxieties of a 'private nature'[2] characterise resistance to mining. The last section shifts focus to Phulbari town, the centre of organised protests in the area, to discuss how differential, and sometimes conflicting, aspirations and interests of different groups feature in the development of the movement.

1. Claims over land

This section is focused primarily on land ownership patterns in Borogram and how the local notion of land rights and official procedures of identifying land owners for any possible compensation led to tension and conflict where negotiations for the mine were originally taking place.

"Por khaoa goru shidure megh dekhle dorai" (a cow which has been through/in a house fire is frightened by the sight of a red cloud/sunset) — this is the expression used by one of the older residents of Borogram village to voice his reason for resisting the proposed mine project in the area.

The village and agricultural lands gradually expand over two main types of land, popularly categorized as 'Kagojer jomi' and 'Khas jomi'. The meaning behind these two types of land takes multiple lines in regards to who is talking about the land, from

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[1] Chatterjee, 1993. p. 5

[2] Grundy-Warr and Wong, 2000. p.12

what socio-political experience, and for what purpose. The movement against mining is greatly intensified by the perceived ownership character of these lands and its implications on the people who are to be displaced. In 'local' terms, 'Kagojer jomi' refers to land whose owner has a deed in their possession, while 'Khas jomi' are those lands possessed without an ownership document; ownership that is established by the value of efforts put into the land over the years to transform it from a forest to cultivable land. The local terms "Kagojer jomi' and an insider's' assertion of 'Khas jomi' becomes much more complicated as the village embarks on the movement against mining. Contestation between the rights that the village people have established over the land and the possibility that these rights may be denied by the State's legal system or the Company's compensation mechanism, plays a significant role in the spread of the movement in Borogram village.

In Bangladesh, Khas land generally connotes government-owned land; thus, all government-owned agricultural and non-agricultural land, including forest, is Khas land. This also applies to common bodies of water, such as rivers. The Ministry of Land of the Government of Bangladesh is the authority to manage these lands as per state legislation. The policy of the Independent Bangladeshi government recognised that Khas land was to be used by the poor, and declared that people who were landless and affected by factors such as river erosions, had the right to be allocated Khas land. The Land Reforms Action Programme of 1987, implemented by the Bangladeshi government, is one such example where landless people's right to be allocated Khas land was prioritized. The propagation of these initiatives created a public discourse that supported the relocation of people affected by river erosions, and/or landless people on Khas land. In fact, there were some government projects in Phulbari sub-district where landless people were resettled in the area and provided with Khas land and 'tiner ghor'[3]. People in Borogram Village, who were forced from their earlier homes due to repeated river erosions, resettled in the new place; land which they perceived as Khas land, and where they assume and assert their rights on the land. The public discourse of Khas land created an expectation that the landless and displaced people could relocate to these government owned lands. While searching for an appropriate area to be relocated to, the elderly members of the village were looking for an area where they could find Khas land; the availability of forest land, which is perceived as Khas Land,

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[3] House built with corrugated tin

attracted them to Phulbari. One of the elderly villagers who were part of the group that first migrated to Borogram states,

> "The Government has given Phulbari land to other landless people. Why can't we live on the government's forest land? River erosions made us landless. Why is the government's land left idle and we can't use it? Lots of other people from our home district have moved to Dinajpur area and they are living in the government land. We have heard that government gives away Khas land to the poor. So why can't we get land?"

He challenges the idea of keeping forest-land in the hands of the forest department when they are using crops from this land to feed the country. He continued:

> "The corrupt forest officials eat up all the benefits that the country could get from this forest land. They collaborate with local wood thieves and sell all the trees, and they lease out the forest land in breach of the law and destroy the forests any way."

He rationalized their possession and rights on the land as he recollected:

> "During our initial migration forest officials threatened to sue us. One day I told a forest officer who came to visit the area that we were producing crops for the country in this infertile land. I told him that if he could prove that the government earned more from this forest than what we were producing we would leave this land. The officer couldn't answer me."

The long and arduous efforts put into this land by people who have turned this apparently uncultivable area into cultivable land add to their assertion of their rights to the land:

> "I proposed to my neighbours that I knew a place where we could find land to live. Initially I brought 20 to 25 people in Borogram to clear forests for building houses and for agriculture. Some of them went back as they found it very hard to clear forests and prepare it for agriculture. It was tough because the land was high and hard and needed a lot of irrigation for agriculture. At that time there were no irrigation machines. We all worked very hard for some years on each

> piece of land that you see fertile today. No one thought of cultivating here until we came and worked so hard. It is no more government's forest land; it is now our agricultural land." [An elderly dewani (social leader) who took the initiative to first establish Borogram village]

The suffering and harassment faced by the elderly villagers to protect their possession of the land during the initial period of establishment enhances their claim over the land. Dewani continued:

> "…Look, there were hardly any nights we could sleep without fear of police in the early days of the village. Forest officials sued us and filed cases against a number of village people. I, along with many others, was arrested and harassed. I spent more than one year in the prison. We suffered but we didn't leave this land. The land you see today didn't come to us easy."

These testimonies describe the ways in which people assume and assert their rights over an area of land and how they make it their own, even though it was originally government land. However, the threat of displacement as a result of the development of the proposed mine forced people to re-think their strategies to claim and protect their rights over the land. This was followed by their observations of how state land legislation, and official and/or 'unofficial' elements, could proceed in formal procedures of settling land ownership and compensation. These observations were frightening and the stories of displacement were worrisome for the people.

The experiences of land and compensation issues in an on-going coal mine in Baropukuria, a neighbouring coal mining area, caused the people of Borogram to feel threatened by the possibility of displacement without receiving much compensation for land which they feel they have 'owned' for years. The Boropukuria coal mine is located in Chowhati village under Parbatiur sub-district in Dinajpur district of Bangladesh[4] and is about six kilometres from Borogram village, and roughly five kilometres from Phulbari town centre. Boropukuria coal mine is an underground coal mine, where coal is extracted from underground without displacing surface soils. It is fully owned by a state owned company and operated by Chinese contractors with a consultancy from a British consulting firm. The coal was first discovered in 1985 and the operation started

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[4] See Annex for Map

in 1998. The development of the mine affected the land and livelihood of the local people. The life stories and miseries experienced by affected people are shared and discussed in everyday village life. **One of the many stories is of Nasimon Khatun,**

Nasimon Khatun lived with her husband, seven sons and three daughters of different ages in an area where the offices and other structures of Boropukuria coal mine were constructed. Her husband owned enough agricultural land in the present mine office complex to meet their expenditure and save money for the future by selling crops. They never had to buy their main food, which was rice, from the market, as their land produced adequate rice to meet their family needs. In addition, they cultivated vegetables in between the rice seasons to sell in the market in order to accumulate money for a crisis period or to manage a financial crisis in case of rice production failure due to natural calamities. Seasonal fruits from the trees were also sold in the village market to add to their savings for a crisis period. They had a pond that was used to raise chickens and ducks, which fed them and their family guests with eggs and meat. Cows were raised on the homestead to plough the agricultural land, along with goats, to raise and sell to earn extra money. Overall, Nasimon's family was considered by the village to be well off.

The discovery of coal and the development of the Baropukuria mine followed a series of soil drilling and other geological survey activities in Chowhati and surrounding villages. Several national and foreign groups of surveyors started soil drilling work and other survey activities on Nasimon's land and other land in the village well before the actual mine established itself in the early 1990's. There were rumours in the village that coal was discovered and they would be given lots of money if they were to be displaced from their land due to the mine development, but no one knew for sure what was going on. Then one day a survey group came to Nasimon's house and took some information about their land and assets, and promised that the family would be given good compensation if the mine company had to take their land. They believed them. Meanwhile, Mrs. Nasimon's husband died of an illness before the mine was established leaving her with the seven children. Then, one day, after some time had passed, a group of labourers from the mine arrived at her home and, in the

presence of police, started to cut trees from their land. Nasimon and her sons rushed to try to stop them as they hadn't received any compensation for the land. They were told that the company had acquired the land and they would be given proper compensation following the official procedures. The police took Nasimon and her eldest son to the police station where Nasimon denied giving permission for the company people clear that piece of land. Nasimon and her son were released the next day under the promise that they would not try to hinder the process of land acquisition. They were assured that the government would pay proper compensation for all the land to be acquired. After this incident they didn't try to stop the acquisition of land for fear of getting taken away by the police. A few months later they had to leave their house and all of their land and move to a small piece of land in the village owned by one of their relatives. Because they didn't have space to keep and raise their cows, goats, chickens, and ducks in the new land, they had to sell their animals.

Then began the 'official' process of getting compensation, which neither Nasimon nor her illiterate sons were familiar with. Nasimon couldn't read or write and never went to the district town where the land office, which was responsible for settling land compensation issues, was located. It was no different for her sons. Soon after they were displaced, a high-up official from the district administration office came to the village and asked for a bribe with a promise of giving proper compensation quickly. Nasimon was living on her tiny savings that her husband had left and didn't have money to bribe the officer. After this, her eldest son with a few other affected villagers went to the district land office to claim their compensation. There, they were asked for a 500 taka (£5) bribe in order to get the list of documents required to submit a compensation application; this was on top of the 200 taka (£2) they had incurred to get there. In this one visit half of the family's total monthly grocery expenditure was gone. It was only the first of many visits that her son had to make for settling compensation matters.

The ownership and legal documents required by the land office were unfamiliar for Nasimon and her son. When Nasimon's husband originally acquired the land, it was equally verbally divided by him and his brother after the death of

their father without making any legal documents; a normal practice in the village. The land office requested proof that Nasimon was actually the wife of the landowner in addition to a recommendation from an elected representative of the local government, the Union Chairman, to prove it. Further complicating matters, they required that Nasimon's husband's brother be present in front of the land officer to prove land ownership. These are some of the complexities that kept arising while they were trying to get their compensation, without much success. The land office was settling the case by the official land holding numbers where Nasimon's lands were dispersed in different holding numbers. Thus, each full procedure had to be followed for every field in each of the holding numbers. Nasimon and her son ran out of money for lobbying for the compensation forcing them to give up after receiving a couple of instalments. Whatever money they did get, was received in instalments at a rate determined by the land office, which was much lower than the usual market prices. The land office determined the price according to the average price mentioned in the land registration document from that village, which was always lower than the actual price at which lands are bought/sold in practice. Mentioning lower prices in the registration document to evade registration tax payable to the government was a normal practice in the village. Moreover, getting compensation in instalments didn't create enough capital to buy land elsewhere. Money was spent in lobbying the land office and on other everyday purposes. All of Nasimon's seven sons are now married with a total of twelve grandchildren, all of who live together with separate 'Chula'[5] in a one decimal land. Her illiterate sons turned to agricultural labour and the family now belongs to the poor segment of the village.

I have collected this story through repeated discussions, interviews, and informal chats with Nasimon and her family, as well as other village members. The impossibility of acquiring compensation for their land and the denial of rights over land by the 'formal' procedures are blowing in the wind of Borogram village in the form of evening chats at the village tea stalls, in the local market, and in village meetings organised by Phulbari activists of the NC. Formal procedures of settling land acquisition and ownership cases, as demonstrated in Nasimon's life history, threaten the Borogram peoples' rights over

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[5] Open stove made of earth and are usually fed by dry leaves, rice husk, cow dung and agro-waste.

Khas land. These rights over this land have been acquired via physical labour, and is perceived, and acknowledged, by the people in surrounding areas who have observed the occupant's long-standing efforts and struggles with the land. Their relatively secure land possession has now become volatile and "insecure"[6] by the possibility of displacement by another mining company. They are now always under threat of the similar 'procedures' that Nasimon had to follow to prove her right over her land.

"....if owner of 'Kagojer jomi' can't claim their rights over their land and get proper compensation how would people living in Khas jomi claim their rights? We just cannot allow mining to take place in our land." - Karim in Borogram village, 'owner' of two acres of Khas land. Resistance to mining is evident as Barrington Moore notes, "what infuriates peasants (and not just peasants) is a new and sudden imposition or demand…that is a break with accepted rules"[7]

Kagojer jomi, on the other hand, also has various ownership patterns depending on the ways in which they were owned. Generally the term 'Kagojer jomi', or 'documented land', is used to indicate land that was not acquired by clearing the forest and whose ownership was documented. A stronger sense of ownership rights over these types of land are asserted as these lands are either bought from previous owners or made socially 'legal'. The process that makes a land Kagojer jomi is attached to the means and ways the lands are transferred, sold and exchanged, and the ways that the new ownership is legitimized in the village. Several forms of land transfer processes are practiced in Borogram, none of which necessarily involve the official land transfer processes of the State. Regardless of ownership history, a land becomes Kagojer jomi if the seller and the buyer sign a paper that indicates the selling terms and price. The presence of witnesses during the deal makes it stronger in the face of any possible disputes, which are usually dealt with in the village *Bichar*, an informal village court. The 'legality' of ownership is defined by the socially legitimate rights of an individual owner of the land in line with factors such as inheritance. Land owned by a neighbouring villager that has a socially accepted history of official ownership is often not challenged by the new buyers. It is common practice in the village to transfer land ownership with verbal and/or written terms set between the buyers and the sellers,

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[6] Jansen, 1986. p. 227
[7] Moore, 1979. p. 474

where the *Bichar* guards the deals and settles the cases of disputes. New buyers carry a particular land's socially established history of legality. The land is, thus, always called Kagojer jomi regardless of the number of times the ownership has changed. This notion of land ownership builds on the internalities of long-standing land relations, which are, people believe, beyond the scope of the official procedures of identifying a landowner for any possible compensation. *"I bought this land with my hard earned money. Everyone knows it. But how will I prove it to the officers? I never went to the land office"* - Local landowner.

2.

"In a new place I will have to live with my head down":

Anxiety breaks out

This section will discuss how local resistance is inspired by some concerns and anxieties of a 'private' nature that often remain unexpressed in public forums of protests in the village. I examine how the lived experiences within social groups, such as the 'Samaj', and the observed 'good' qualities of the 'community' plays a role in forming the resistance to the threat of displacement.

While land, assets, and a house all were noted as quantifiable units by which an amount of money could be fixed as compensation by the impact assessment team of the Asia Energy, these also carry other meanings to the people of Borogram in unquantifiable terms. These aspects are not readily open to the 'outsider' surveyor, and are much more complicated than something that can be compensated. In the realms of village life, ownership of land represents 'Samman' which brings people social leadership and pride. A house is more than just a living place; it is a 'home' built upon generational community relations. Displacement from land and house means the loss of 'home' and community. Loss of community means loss of 'Samman' that was earned over years. Previous experiences of migration compound the trepidations of losing a 'home'.

Within rural Bangladesh, 'home' is represented, as Gardner[8] shows, with a kind of spiritual relation that is based on cherished social connections along with economic insecurity and struggles in everyday life. 'Away' is viewed as a place of opportunities

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[8] Gardner, 1993

and economic prosperity. Despite the presence of a pull factor for the spiritual bondage at 'home', migrating 'away', to Britain for example, is seen as a strategy to bring material success. The process of migration accompanies a continuous exchange between, and an uneasy coexistence of, images of 'home' and 'away'. As Gardner perfectly quotes the words of a village women's song: "How can I accept that my husband has gone to London? When my brother goes to London…He will make a blouse for me"[9]. Arguments presented by Gardner are based on the cases of international migration and migration processes that have a long history of bringing material fortunes. Enhanced land buying power has been brought to family members back home through the supply of remittances from the migrants who have gone away[10], while land-loss remains a common phenomenon for others in similar areas and elsewhere in Bangladesh[11]. Aspiration for material fortunes acts as a pull factor for this kind migration, but past experiences and factors that characterised the migration process of Borogram people from their earlier home is different in many ways from this kind of migration[12].

This is expressed in some way by the testimony of an elderly village resident as stated at the beginning of this chapter. Stories of migration are of losing homes, land, 'Samman', 'protipotti' (pride), and the struggle of making a new home. Repeated river erosions resulted in total land loss, forcing migration, and causing homelessness and economic insecurities. The life story of Dewani is one such example.

> Dewani was a mobile trader and supplier of ornaments and stones during the 1960's before the independence of Bangladesh. He travelled the entire north-Bengal area often for his business and earned enough money to buy over 20 acres of land in his village in Chapainawabgang in north-Bengal. His brothers also had a considerable amount of land, some of which was owned hereditarily. He and his brothers enjoyed social leadership and gave final verdicts in mitigating village conflicts. Having earned knowledge about the outside world from his small business, he enjoyed the respect of other villagers.

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[9] Gardner, 1993. p.1
[10] Gardner, 1993
[11] Jansen, 1987
[12] A later study, by Gardner and Ahmed (2006), on internal migration in Bangladesh shows how migration is associated with uncertainties of livelihood options in the new place.

The River Padma was five kilometres from their village, but it made its way to the village in just a few months. Most of Dewani's agricultural land, including his house, like many others in the village, sunk into the river. In just a few months time he became homeless with his five children and wife. He moved to his brother's land whose land was further away from the river and built a makeshift house to live in. Having lost almost all of his land, Dewani lost his ability to hire people to work on his land. Hit by river erosions landless people were desperately looking for work and Dewani was busy looking for additional work outside the village to maintain his family. He was no longer a leader of the village that had been hit by food and work crises due to the river erosions. People started to move to neighbouring districts in search of work. Many left for cities to pull rickshaws, which was considered disgraceful work. While travelling for his business Dewani started to look for a place to migrate as living on his brother's land was also considered shameful. He chose to migrate to what is now Borogram village. He initially came with twenty-five other villagers affected by the river. Many others of a similar economic condition followed them in order to build a new village. He left his mother with his brothers in Chapainawabganj, his former village, as she didn't want to move from her home village.

The case of Dewani would be best described as forced displacement, which resulted in a degraded socio-economic status and the loss of the 'forms of social capital'[13]. The separation from 'home' and land loss implies not only the loss of physical capital but also the loss of social capital such as 'Samman'. The process that followed was of regaining his socio-economic position in a new place. Though he left his brothers and mother in his former village, a new sense of home was built through a long process that was "related and intertwined" in the process of collective struggles and cooperation, as well as events of conflicts[14]. People of Borogram migrated from a couple of neighbouring villages in Chapainawabganj, some of whom are known or related to each other, while some are not, but they share the experiences of trauma and rupture of river erosions, which shape the 'collective memories' of displacement in Borogram and add value to the 'new place'.

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[13] Wood, 2005
[14] Abbas, 1994. p. 442; see also Appadurai, 1991; Gupta and Ferguson, 1992

As we have seen in the previous chapter, the hardships of the early days in the 'new' forest land demanded that the people work together and co-operate with each other. People helped each other to clear their pieces of land, as it was impossible to do it alone. Building new houses also required the help of others. Working together helped to bring previously unknown people together to form a society. Visits from forest officials and arrests by the police were regular events which were handled by bribing officials with money raised proportionately from all residents according to the amount of land cleared. Members of the village who were considered clever and/or relatively educated conducted negotiations with officials and were then regarded as 'Dewans', or social leaders.

They also needed to act together in order to guard their crops and cattle from thieves from neighbouring localities as they were, being outsiders and thus vulnerable, targets. Lacking social connections with other local villages around them, the people of Borogram had to help each other to protect their crops and assets. They formed a group to patrol in the night to prevent thefts and new family relations were built through marriages between families. As the village expanded and the number of people increased, disputes and conflicts within the village also increased. Land disputes, family conflicts, and competition for control of resources, such as irrigation systems, are some examples of the social tensions in Borogram village. To manage the increasing differences between groups, a group of new 'Dewans' were declared by the elderly Dewans to mange conflicts and disputes for their respective clusters of people living in different corners of the village. All these social processes continue to build a feeling of 'samaj' (home, society and societal relations) in Borogram, which were expressed again and again whenever the issues of displacement came up during my stay in the village.

While a house can be built overnight and replaced by another one, a home cannot be. It is this social and cultural dimension that is inseparable from a sense of home[15] and cannot be compensated in the case of displacement by the development of a mine. As one village shopkeeper questioned, *"…say they will give us a new house…but how will they give us our Samaj that we have built here?"*

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[15] Constable, 1999

More than a home, new social capital built through shared experiences of displacement, struggle over land and cooperation in the 'new place' plays a role in forming the extreme anxiety experienced by the possibility of dislocation by the mining company. Though away from their original home village, this 'new place' brought them what they lost in Chapainawabganj; land and Samaj. It ended the homelessness that was characterised by the disgrace of living on others land, creating "new experiences and ways of thinking"[16] about the value of Samaj. The early experiences of living in a 'new place' away from the original 'home' accompanied anxieties of being 'new' to the place. Stories are told by the elderly generation of Borogram of how, in the early days, they felt frightened by the neighbouring villagers in cases of conflicts over land, as they were isolated in the 'new place' and did not have much support from other villages. Stories are also common of how the muggers from the neighbouring villages kept the early residents of Borogram in fear of theft and robbery, as the group was too small to resist and did not have much help from outside the village. These stories influence the way people anticipate the effect of dislocation and the loss of Samaj, as is evidenced by the worries of one Borogram resident, *"If I am displaced to a place where I don't know anyone I will have to live with my head down."*

How will I fit into a new place? This question expresses a "more private, personalized, or idiosyncratic"[17] worry in contrast to public concerns that are discussed and talked about openly. The concerns expressed in the previous quotes are of a more public nature and are talked about more openly, while male anxieties about the security of the female members of their family are of private nature. Living within their own village where people are either related or known to each other for a long time provides a sense of security for the women and girls. In the absence of the male members of the family, relatives or friends next door are there to make the women feel secure. It is common for poor male members of Borogram to work outside of the village and Phulbari town between harvesting seasons when there is scarcity of work in the village, leaving the women and girls at home. Some go to other districts and towns to work for weeks at a time, leaving their family in the village. Any cases of harassment towards women are dealt with through the *Bichar*, and persons responsible are punished verbally, physically, or/and with fines, according to the degree of the harassment. Living in a

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[16] Grundy-Warr and Wong, 2000. pp. 93-122
[17] Grundy-Warr and Wong, 2000

Samaj provides people with security for the female members of their family and allows them to work outside of the village during crisis periods.

There are other concerns of a private nature that are not expressed explicitly in regular public forums, such as village meetings organised by the local activists. It is only through longer interactions with the people that more subtle concerns are revealed. One aspect of this concerns the informal financial institutions in the village. Access to informal and semi-formal credit facilities is an integral part of village life in Borogram, like elsewhere in Bangladesh[18]. Started during the 1970s with the innovations of Grameen Bank and its founder Professor Younus, the collateral free village group-based semi-formal small loans and savings facility has become the main financial service system in all of rural Bangladesh. Along with big national social developments, non-governmental organisations and hundreds of small local NGOs provide small credit facilities in the villages. Village solidarity groups are formed to guarantee the repayment of loans taken by any individual and to create peer pressure in cases of default. It is now well established that this system of credit has become extremely popular in all villages in Bangladesh, as is evident by annual reports produced by some of the big players of credit providers[19]. Borogram is no exception, with a number of local and national NGOs providing small loans to villagers. However, a closer look at the financial behaviours of Borogram's people reveals a contrasting picture of how and why people in the village, in certain cases, prefer other forms of credit that are more informal in nature and attached to the realms of social relations, despite the presence of numerous credit providers.

Moneylenders still play a role in Borogram's financial market even where NGOs provide credit at a relatively lower interest rate. Some aspects of the financial behaviours of poor people are visible to moneylenders, and are thus better communicated than by the financial institutions. The need for money for the poor in Borogram is related to the specificities of the village. As the village is a high land area, its timing and pattern of agricultural production is a little different than that of flat land areas. As we have seen it needs more irrigation than flatter land for rice production in

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[18] Wood and Sharif, 1997; Sina and Matin, 1998

[19] See BRAC annual reports, 2009. www.brac.net/oldsite/useruploads/files/brac-ar-2009.pdf.
Grameen Bank annual reports 2009. http://www.grameen-
info.org/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=786&Itemid=756

the dry seasons creating a high demand of loans among the poor during the month prior to irrigation. Since rice production is costly due to extensive irrigation, alternative crops, such as corn, are widely produced in the village. The timing of corn production is different than rice production, which is generally the main crop in the area, and so is the need for loans to meet the cost of production. Local moneylenders have local knowledge about the trends of loans needed in the village, in addition to the experience of when to provide loans and to ask the money back.

With these needs, and the trends of poor borrowers, local moneylenders provide flexible loans before production and require repayment right after harvesting when people do not mind paying higher interest. The generic criteria for acquiring a loan and the setting of schedules to maintain repayment disciplines fixed by the NGOs cannot meet the specific financial needs and repayment behaviours of the borrowers of Borogram. In addition, membership of the same Samaj plays the role of collateral for moneylenders and borrowers where default cases are negotiated using long term social relations. The membership of Samaj also provides the borrower with the facility of getting a loan without following any fixed procedures and time criteria, which are set by credit organisations during emergency need. Moneylenders often live next door to the borrowers and are related to the borrowers through secondary or tertiary lines of kinship which can be used to convince moneylenders to lend money to people with bad repayment histories. Moreover, it is common in Borogram to repay a loan and interest with the equivalent portion of the crops produced in the land, creating an option for the borrowers who do not want the hassle of going to Phulbari town to sell their crops, or who do not feel confident of getting the proper price for their crops in an unknown town market. They have enough helping hands in the village to weigh their crops properly and give the lender his portion back. Loans often come in kind and take very tiny forms such as a bowl of rice on a day when the main earner is not working due to sickness, or few eggs to treat relatives making a sudden visit. The entire financial life in the village revolves around a mechanism that is rooted in the qualities of Borogram Samaj. A breakdown of that Samaj poses a particular threat to the poor in need of credit, as one of the poorest farmers in the village noted,

> "People who have money will buy new land and build new houses in the
> cities…but where will we go…. In a new place who will lend us money in an

emergency, say, if I need to take my wife to hospital? No one trusts the poor. Here, people know that I will not run away with their money. I can at least ask for some rice from next door when I don't have food in the house. I will at least not die from hunger here...I go to protest meetings regularly"

Newly developed economic abilities and social statuses, for some, through the acquisition of land in Borogram, also plays a role in forming resistance to the possible displacement from mining. A few members of the village acquired large amounts of land, as the result of being early settlers to the village when there was more land available to clear and establish rights to. Possession of such land provided them with the capacity to employ poor villagers to work on their land, thus gaining them a higher social status in the village. Increased economic capacity allowed some to invest money into better institutions in the cities for their children's education thereby further enhancing their social status. One such villager states:

"I might be illiterate but my sons are educated… people respect my sons, they come for suggestions and help for different matters. People respect me."

This enhanced socio-economic status, which has been attained over the years, is now under threat due to the proposed mining; money will not buy the status he has gained. He continues,

"… I will just be another person in a new place! There would be lot of other people with a lot more money than me. Who would give me so much land in a new place? People won't give a damn if I can't employ a person or two. What will I do with the money? I am not going anywhere from this place…they can do whatever they want."

What will I do with the money? This question builds on other 'inner' and unexpressed areas of disquiet. Bangladesh is a country with more than eighty percent of its total household engaged in agricultural activities[20] and numerically dominated by its peasantry[21]. Historically, agriculture is the main occupation for people in Bangladesh[22] and Borogram is no exception with most of its resident's dependant on generational

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[20] Bangladesh agriculture census, 2008
[21] Wood, 1978
[22] Among others, see Barkat, 2001

skills of agriculture for their livelihood. From wage labour to petty landowners, all members invest and re-invest their labour, skills, and money into land-related production activities. Whatever surplus money is earned from other seasonal occupations, such as short-term migration to the cities, tends to be invested back into the village to better equip themselves for production, such as buying cows to plough the land. Savings accumulated by selling the surplus crops of larger landowners is usually re-invested into buying more land or production equipment, such as an irrigation machine. Small amounts of money accumulated from petty trading in the village market, along with some credit taken from lenders, are used to attain a piece of land on a fixed yearly or seasonal rent from a neighbour in order to maximize savings by producing cash crops. Money use patterns revolve around land and production-related activities. Promises by the company and the government for equivalent money for land and assets are received with uneasy anxiety because of people's relative inexperience of using compensation money with good effect in the case of displacement, as is expressed by one participant,

> "… money doesn't stay in your pocket. A king's treasury would be finished if you can't use it properly. Agriculture is all I know. There is no readymade land waiting for me to be bought. The money they will give me for my assets will go out of pocket quickly"

Even when people actually believe that they would get a sum of money for their land and assets, the specific patterns and experiences, or inexperiences, of money-use forms this subtle denial to the proposals of mining.

Conclusion

As we have seen land rights have been a key factor in the history of struggles. The particular notion of land ownership in Borogram also plays a critical role in forming the local movement against mining. While the local land category of Kagojer jomi is owned through the socially defined 'legal' means, Khas land, on the other hand, is possessed through the presence of the occupier and the value of the long hard work that has been invested in the land to make it cultivable. Rights to Khas land are acquired and earned over periods of struggle to protect and nurture the land. The owners of these lands find their moral authority to possess the land in the government's declared

commitment to landless people. The proposal of displacement by the mining development plan, as experiences from a neighbouring mine field have shown, means that the unfamiliar official procedures of identifying land ownership would defy their acquired land rights. Their past experiences of becoming landless add to their resistance to the mine.

On a more private level, anxieties related to the loss of Samaj, characterised by generational social relations, act to form resistance to the mine. Conflicts for the control of and access to resources and the desire for 'Samman' are negotiated, while cooperation to protect the crops from thieves and unity to win land disputes with other villagers are enforced by the "good qualities"[23] of Samaj. "Personal and idiosyncratic"[24] aspects of individuals, which are not expressed and talked about openly, such as the concern for the security of the female members of the family in a new place, enforce the importance of not losing Samaj. Contrary to the apparent success of the rural credit facility programme of the non-governmental organisations, people's specific credit needs and repayment behaviours are better served by local village moneylenders. A particular pattern and timing of crop production in the village presents specific credit needs for the poor which are understood better by relatives or friends in the village who are involved in moneylending.

The multi-transactional ties in Chapai Samaj produces certain 'social resources' for the individuals in the form of "kin, status and inclusion in networks, comprising obligations and entitlements"[25]. The anxieties of losing these social resources provoke resistance to the mine in Borogram. The possibility of losing Samaj, created by the proposals of mine development, poses a particular threat to the poor, *"We would rather die here than move out"*, said a resident of Borogram. People resist for different reasons based on their particular experiences; it is a terrain of social politics.

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[23] Narayan, 1997
[24] Grundy-Warr and Wong, 2000
[25] Wood, 2005. p. 5, 6

Part Two

'Localised' politics and Strategic opposition

On another level, conflict around the mining proposals builds upon the 'moral commitment'[26] or desire for the control of tangible and intangible benefits that result from both mine development activity, and the opposition to it. Collier & Hoeffler relates this conflict for mining benefits with 'greed, not grievance'[27]; that is, the battle for control of rent resources is the main causal element of a conflict. The discussion in this section intends to establish that the nature of the desires attached to the protests is related to the socio-political positions that are beyond the scope of the simple accounts of "greed/grievances". Shifting our attention to the organisation of the movement in Phulbari town, the centre of more elaborate protest activities in the sub-district, will contextualise this discussion.

<p style="text-align:center">**   **</p>

 "Come to the office. Did you forget? Today is rally day. We will have tea and join the rally." Mahmud, an activist in Phulbari, reminded me over the phone to join the weekly protest rally organised by the Phulbari branch of NC. It had been two weeks since I arrived to live in Borogram and I had been making almost daily visits to the NC office in the town, like many other activists do. I observed that the activists came here not only to discuss protest issues, but the office had also become a kind of social space to chat and share daily life events over a cup of tea. Over the subsequent months of my stay in Borogram I became a regular part of this socio-political place. This is where I was able to identify the background and politics of the organised protest in Phulbari.

Phulbari town is situated within the proposed mining areas, which encompasses a larger area, including surrounding villages. Phulbari is a small town surrounded by paddy fields and villages and should open-pit mining take place, Phulbari town and some adjacent villages would have to be resettled[28]. The local NC office is situated in a shop in *Nimtali,* the market place in the centre of the town, along the road that connects

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[26] Welker, 2002. p. 168
[27] Collier and Hoeffler, 2000
[28] Section 2.1 of Chapter Five includes the description of the actual amount of areas planned to be acquired for the mine.

Phulbari to Dhaka. Shops selling groceries, clothes, electronics and mobile phones, and restaurants and tea stalls lined along the road make *Nimtali* a busy place. The weekly rice market is held in front of the town's cinema hall *Urbashi*, close to *Nimtali*, where people from the surrounding villages come to buy and sell rice. People from the surrounding villages also make regular visits to the shops in *Nimtali* selling fertilizers and fuel for irrigation machines. As such, the NC is situated in a place that is visited daily by people from the surrounding villages for their shopping needs, making the office a convenient place for interactions between town activists and village actors.

One way that activism in the town is manifested is through the weekly protest rally held every Friday, the *Haatbar*, or the day of the weekly market. People from the surrounding villages gather in the town in larger numbers on the *Haatbar* to buy and sell vegetables, rice and cattle so this day is chosen for the weekly rally by the town activists to draw the people to participate in the rally. Protest activities, such as the weekly rally, are facilitated by a general committee of about fifty one members, called the Phulbari branch of NC, and its sub-committees, who mobilise people against the mine in the town, as well as in the villages.

The general committee and sub-committees consist mainly of local leaders, activists of left wing political parties and sympathetic locals. Members of the general committee are responsible for decision-making regarding the overall organisation of the protests. An executive committee of 15-20 members, headed by a president, makes decisions in consensus with the other members. The sub-committees, each headed by a member secretary, are based in different clusters of the town. Members of the sub-committees are responsible for mobilising people in their respective areas for a particular protest activity and they regularly participate in meetings organised by the general committee.

The general committee is the first point of contact for the Dhaka-based activists who regularly visit Phulbari as part of their organisational activities and in the event of periodic large-scale protests. The president of the Phulbari general committee is elected by consensus of its members and in discussion with the leaders of the central committee in Dhaka. The general committee selects the member secretary of the sub-committees in Phulbari. Thus, the NC in Phulbari consists of the town-based people with regular connections and organisational support from Dhaka activists.

The members of the Phulbari NC and its sub-committees consist mainly of middle-class educated people, such as local business owners, lecturers from local higher-secondary colleges and managers of local NGOs, as well as educated young people from local well-off families. The general committee also includes an elected representative of the local government who attributed his success in the election to public support he gained as an anti-mining activist. The majority of the members, including the president of the general committee, has had involvement, or a history of involvement, in left-liberal politics. They have mobilised worker's associations, such as the association of wage labourers in restaurants and the rickshaw-puller's association, in favour of the anti-mining protests and included a few leaders of these associations in the committees. But, it is the people of educated and middle class backgrounds who have the strongest presence in the committees.

The members of these committees interact with village actors to disseminate protest agendas and inform people of events, such as the weekly protest rally, through periodic village discussions. The activists also make efforts to gather participants to the rally from the town by invoking their associations with respective political parties. Efforts are made to promote interaction between the town activists and the village actors through the organisation of protest activities

These efforts are strengthened when larger processions for particular events, such as the observation of Phulbari Day on August 26th, are planned. The weeks leading up to an event are observed to generate a higher frequency of town activist visits to the villages to discuss and mobilise participation. Organising such events requires expenditure for hiring sound systems and/or printing banners and leaflets. The funds are mobilised locally from sympathetic individuals, shopkeepers, traders in the town and local members of left political parties participating in NC, as well as from village people who are willing to contribute. While a sympathetic shop owner in Nimatali contributes two hundred taka (about two pounds), a poor but interested resident in Borogram contributes as little as five taka (about five pence). *"We even welcome one taka (one penny), whatever people are willing to contribute. The amount is not important; the participation is."* said an activist visiting Borogram to raise funds for the upcoming events of Phulbari Day 2009. Through village discussions and fund raising activities local NC activists mobilise participation for protest events, such as the Phulbari Day

observance, and seek to turn resistance into action. However, mobilisation activities do not always mean a smooth integration of the town activists and village actors. The context within which such activities take place involves certain elements of difference between the two groups. The following description of an encounter between the town activists and some village people will provide an example of this:

Shaheen Kibria and Billal are waiting in the village market beside Shaheen's motorcycle for people to come out of the adjacent mosque after finishing their afternoon prayer. Shaheen is a college teacher in a higher-secondary college in the town and Billal has finished his BA from a college in Dinajpur. Both Shaheen and Billal have been visiting the village for the last few days informing people of the upcoming Phulbari Day, which is just a week away. The day will be observed through a large protest rally in the town and a large number of participants from the village are expected to attend. 'Lets go. The prayer is finished,' said Shaheen. Addressing the fifteen people coming out of the mosque Shaheen said, 'Assalamualaikum (greetings). Many of you know us. We come regularly to this village. I am from Phulabri Jatio Committee (Phulbari NC).'

[29]RB1: Yes brother I have seen you before. You have come to talk about Phulbari Day, isn't it?

Shaheen: Yes brother. We all have to attend the rally. We have come to remind you about this. Will you all come?

RB2: We must go. If we don't go how will the protest be organised.

RB3: Vaijan (elder brother), tell us what is going on about the mine. Are they really going to cancel the mining plan?

Billal: They have to cancel. That's why we all need to attend the protests we organise.

RB3: But we hear that our MP (member of parliament from the ruling Awami League) has said in a meeting in Phulbari that Jatio Committee people are doing these protests for their own political gain and to gain popularity for the next election?

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[29] Resident of Borogram (RB)

Billal: This is propaganda from those who want to negate the anti-mining protests.

RB3: We hear that people in the town have started to buy land on the other side of Phulbari (the area outside of the mining site) in case mining takes place in the end. They have the money; they can buy land in other places. Would they understand our misery? (With smile) You are from the town as well? You live in the comfort of an electric fan. Would you understand our suffering?

Shaheen: Jatio Committee has always been with you, no? We are promoting your demands.

RB4: I went to the town the other day and met one of the supporters of Awami League (AL); he said that only AL can bring the best for the village people.

Shaheen: Do you believe them? You all know that they are not protesting against the mine.

RB4: Well, many of us voted for AL in the last election but we are now confused who really feels for us. You all live in the town; you are *dhoni manush* (well-off people); how will you understand what will happen to us if the mine takes place?

Billal: We are with you brother. Don't worry; together with you we will force Asia Energy to flee this country.

RB3: We don't understand AL or BNP or Jatio Committee; whoever is against the mine, we are with them.

RB4: Yes, yes. We just don't want the mine. We will go to the rally.

Encounters of this kind reveal the way that connections between the town activists and the village actors takes place through the negotiation of uneasy relationships between these two groups. The uneasiness may arise from the difference in socio-economic backgrounds, as the village people remain suspicious about the extent to which the well-off town activists understand their situation and stand by their side. It also arises from the unfamiliarity of the village people with the town activists and their ultimate motives. Finally, the support base of the two major right wing political parties, AL and BNP, at the village level interferes with the way the town activists and village actors

negotiate their engagement with the protests. The "moral purpose"[30] of these protests entails "a significant local dynamic"[31], as is further discussed when looking into the development of the movement in Phulbari town.

<div align="center">**   **</div>

The Australian mining company BHP-Billiton[32] attained their exploration survey contract from the Government of Bangladesh and started their exploration survey in Phulbari in the 1990s. In 1998, the company handed over their entire project to Asia Energy PLC[33] who started their work in Phulbari with the same field team that had worked for BHP-Billiton. Initial surveys and office infrastructure development activities of these companies showed promise for the local contractors, suppliers, elites, and politicians to earn good money. Lessons learned from underground coal mining development activities in adjacent Boropukuria, roughly six kilometres from Phulbari, showed that local elites could earn a lot of money by providing human labour and other supplies. Indeed, Asia Energy did need contractors to build and develop roads, to hire labourers for survey drilling and road development, and to employ people for its Phulbari offices. To win people's consent for the mine, Asia Energy's Phulbari officials employed local people and awarded supply contracts to local elites and politicians; a manipulative tactic according to a local former employee of the company. In fact, employing local people for mining activities is a strategy declared in the 'community development' section of Asia Energy's printed documents. It is this promise of supply contracts from company officials that started conflicts between the company and some local elites and politicians, as some were not getting the contracts they were promised or had expected. As a local activist recalled, *"Some local powerful elites started to criticize Asia Energy's project in public meetings only to press them to get supply contracts from them...I asked one of my friends, who was an elected ward commissioner in the town, why he was criticizing Asia Energy in public places while he was trying to get a contract from them. He said if he didn't push them he wouldn't get anything from them."*

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[30] Welker, 2009
[31] Ferguson, 2006. p. 99
[32] BHP is an Australia-based global natural resources company and Billiton is an Australian mining company. BHPBilliton is a merger between the two companies having its corporate offices in Australia, United Kingdom, South Africa and United States.
[33] Asia Energy corporation pty ltd. is a wholly owned subsidiary of London-based GCM resources plc.

With extensive development work in the first part of the year 2004, such as building a soil test laboratory, the company's project began to be discussed to a greater extent at the national level. As the company proposed to adopt an open-pit method for the mine, the national dailies published regular articles about the issues surrounding the project by people from both pro- and anti-mining quarters. The NC presented their own analysis on the impact of this project in national newspapers and on television channels.

In line with these analyses, left political party representatives of the NC in Phulbari decided to organise protests against the open-pit mining method. As left wing political activists openly discussed the potential destructive impact of the open-pit method, public opinion in Phulbari began to mount against this method. In this atmosphere, a group of local politicians, primarily from two major mainstream political parties, took the initiative and formed a local committee to protest against Asia Energy. The committee, called 'Phulbari rakhkha committee' was the first declared forum in Phulbari to protest against mining, and included representatives from both the left and mainstream parties, as well as local elites. However, the objectives of the leaders of that committee have been contested and questioned by other activists who do not associate themselves with leaders of mainstream political parties, as is evidenced by the comments of one activist, *"Local leaders of the mainstream political parties initiated that committee partly to get public support for elections and partly to press Asia Energy to get supply contracts."* These sentiments were further confirmed by another activist, *"Some engaged themselves in that committee because of their anger for not getting any financial benefits from the company."* For the purpose of this research it was irrelevant to inquire as to the authenticity of these allegations. However, it was important to reveal that, against the background of these accusations, a competing group of protesters was developing within a different set of aspirations.

The left-oriented members of the committee wanted to take on different protest strategies than the leaders of the Phulbari rakhkha committee. *"The mainstream political party leaders of the Phulbari rakhkha committee never wanted to undertake any aggressive protest activities as some of them were part of the government,"* said a local left party activist. It was this difference of opinion in regards to strategy that caused the left party members of the Phulbari rakhkha committee to have a conflict

with the committee leader who wanted to protest mostly through small public meetings and rallies. In contrast to the leaders of the committee, left party activists began to have regular communication with NC leaders in Dhaka to form the Phulbari branch of NC. Under the banner of the NC, local left party activists started to take on more aggressive protests activities, such as a blockade of Asian Energy's offices and barring local people from working with the company or renting out their houses to people associated with the company.

After the formation of an alliance between some local elements and the Phulbari branch of NC, the NC decided to stage its biggest protest rally in Phulbari on August 26, 2006; their one demand was that Asia Energy leave Phulbari by the end of the day. Leaders of the Phulbari rakhkha committee wanted to stop this protest and distributed leaflets asking people not to attend. *"They wanted to stop this protest because they were losing local public leadership. Local NC leaders had taken over public leadership by then"*, said a local resident involved in the protest. Now organised protests in Phulbari were more or less led by the NC. As we have seen the electoral politics of Bangladesh are mainly centred on two major political parties, the Awami League and BNP. Though the left parties had achieved little or no success in previous elections in Bangladesh, the mining protests have brought left leaders into important positions during local elections in Phulbari. For example, in 2008 a member of the left party of the Phulbari NC was elected the chairman of the local government of Phulbari sub-district. Aspirations for public leadership and election success are evident among members of Phulbari NC, as they are actively planning to participate in all other upcoming local and national elections. It is well established in the area that the movement against mining brought election success for the leader of Phulbari NC. This past success, and the promise of future success, in electoral politics acts as an incentive for the leaders of the Phulbari movement. A more naïve purpose of the left ideology, inspired by the NC activists, has become entangled with aspirations to, and the promise of, becoming an elected representative of the state system. Such aspirations can be sensed in the story of Hamid Akhter.

> I was in Dhaka doing my Bachelors degree when Asia Energy proposed the open-pit mining in Phulbari in 2005. I couldn't just live in Dhaka when the people of Phulbari needed guidance for their struggle against Asia Energy.

More than anything people needed leadership and we formed the Phulbari branch of NC to provide that leadership to the people. I came to Phulbari and worked days and nights to mobilize people against the mine. During those days I spent most of my time on a motorcycle travelling from village to village talking to people and giving them information about how destructive the mine would be. I knew Phulbari lacked people who could lead. People needed someone like me to mobilize them against the mine. I did exactly that. And you see the result? Asia Energy had to flee Phulbari.

I now have to live in Phulbari as Asia Energy is still there trying to make a comeback, and you know our mainstream political leaders are good for nothing. People don't want them. My dream now is becoming a leader of Phulbari one day so that I can work for the people and give them proper guidance. If you get elected in the parliamentary election you can do more for the people. If you are honest if you are with the people protesting against Asia Energy people will vote for you. We worked day and night for the movement and you see we won in the local election. We now have a better voice in local politics; this is just the start you know.

Hamid has thrived in opposing Asia Energy. The success of the NC supported-candidate in the local election and the movement against the mine inspired him to be a voice for the   affected people by using the state machineries to his favour. However, Hamid's story does not fit neatly together with the testimony of one local resident, who obtained a contract from the company and states,

"No one will give you anything if you don't ask for it loudly. If we get some contracts some local people will be employed. There is nothing wrong in pressing the company."

Incompatible stories of these kinds and the recognition of discrepancies between them enable us to identify the dynamics of resistance in Phulbari. Through these testimonies we see that the protests against mining are specific to particular rationale and purpose. The simple standards of assessment through ideas of greed versus grievance are too simplistic to understand these 'local dynamics'. What one group alleges to be greed is termed legitimate rights by the other. Benefiting from the mining activities in the area

in obtaining contracts for supplies and labourers, as well as gaining employment for local people, are seen as the legitimate rights of the leaders. Strategies are formulated, whether hidden or open, to maximise opportunities and benefits. An apparent "greed" protester invokes on his "own moral framework"[34] to rationalise his resistance as much more than "just opposition"[35].

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[34] Welker, 2002. p. 167
[35] Ortner, 1995

Chapter Seven

Its not that we cuddled them:

Collaboration of differences

As the material presented so far in this thesis suggests, it is important to understand the specificities of resistance movements within particular contexts. The ethnographic evidence of the last chapter demonstrates how socially entrenched, and sometime less visible, aspects of local realities characterise local resistance to planned mining. Yet, we would be mistaken to see the localised and national movements and experiences as bounded and disconnected. This chapter focuses on how the Phulbari movement moves through contingent collaborations between disparate groups and experiences. I will explore how the possibilities of wider linkages and connections are formed through the 'friction'[1] of incompatible ideas and observation. In doing so, I attend to the group character of the National Committee, the forum that organises the protests at the national scale, and the nature of collaboration it entails. I explore the aspects of collaboration in the Phulbari movement further by looking at the nature of the interaction of ideas and observations held within an environmental NGO and the Borogram 'community'.

Before moving to a context-specific discussion, I will present relevant theoretical discussions around the processes of the spread of knowledge and experiences across loci. Drawing insight from these discussions this chapter explores the organisation and spread of the Phulbari movement. I draw on particular examples of connections between the villagers, national activists and an environmental organisation engaged in the Phulbari movement.

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Tsing suggests a critical exploration of how different locations are in interaction regardless of 'whether we place ourselves inside or outside the West'[2]. In this, Tsing

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[1] Tsing, 2005
[2] Tsing, 2005. p. 2

notes that dialogue between cultures gives rise to global aspirations for elements of global politics, i.e. liberal politics, and global economy, i.e. neo-liberalism, that have spread around the world; global connections 'give grip' to these universal aspirations. She does not mean that the claims and acts of universal aspirations 'make everything everywhere the same'[3], rather she suggests that this connection is a pathway or 'channel' that is moving forward and which, on its way, accommodates different ideas only to widen this channel. The act of universalising creates a means of connecting different ideas that make the circulation of knowledge possible across localities. Experiences gained from interactions in particular localities infuse into these universal channels expanding, rather than disrupting, them.

This channel does not, however, operates like a 'well-oiled machine' but expands through a process of tension between, and resistance from, different socio-political and cultural groups. Tsing argues that the processes of tension and resistance do not make the universal processes weak; they present avenues for connections between different groups that strengthen the workings of the process. Tsing presents her ideas of 'friction' to explain how the universal channel expands through the process of friction to strengthen the connection between different locations and ideas. Her ideas of friction are not synonymous to resistance, as she shows that the impact of encounters between differing groups can be compromising or empowering. Friction does not necessarily slow things down; it gets in the way to make global connections happen and to keep the universal channel in motion. For her, friction works like roads. Roads provide a means to travel and make travelling easier and efficient, however, roads simultaneously limit our choices of movement and travel. In other words, roads are the structure for movement while at the same time constraining movement. Friction, similarly, facilitates the universal channel through the historical processes of 'enabling, excluding and particularising'[4]. Differences between groups sometimes inspire 'insurrection' and insurrection makes connections possible. The act of friction is to make a connection stronger.

As evidenced in Chapter Four, dominated by left-oriented political leaders, the members of the National Committee promoted their views of the movement against

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[3] Tsing, 2000. p. 4
[4] Tsing, 2005. p. 6

Asia Energy in Phulbari as a protest against the power that enforces global capital in the name of 'globalisation'. My ethnographic exploration of the realities of the Phulbari movement revealed more complex reasons for resistance within villages surrounding the proposed site. Rather than being a resistance contingent uniformly on anti-global logics, the material presented so far shows that resistance at the local level is determined by socio-political complexities between both groups. Building on this, this chapter will discuss how the movement and strategies of encounters build on frictional alliances at different levels[5]; in this case collaboration between 'local' villagers and an environmental organisation with a commitment to global ideas.

1. Dilemma of alliances

Contemporary resistances and movements develop and operate, as Tsing suggests, through negotiations between different groups, a process that is characterised by particular spheres of connections that are not so tidy and coherent. To explore such spheres in the Phulbari movement I will concentrate to a greater extent on the development and internal organisation of the National Committee who facilitated the movement at the national and local levels. I will explore the making of the Phulbari movement as a general idea that attended to certain differences in views between the participants of the National Committee. Lastly, I will examine how the processes of becoming 'general' are characterised by the friction of disparate experiences and observations.

Protests against the coal project proposed by the Asia Energy Corporation followed an emerging trend of organised demonstrations against foreign and multinational corporation's interventions into the country's natural resource field. As discussed in Chapter Three, independent Bangladesh's economic policy had moved away from its early commitment to certain ideas of socialism, such as the nationalisation of the industries, to liberal economic principles of privatisation. As discussed, the post-1975 economic policies of Bangladesh were largely shaped by suggestions from global institutions, such as the IMF. In line with these suggestions, private enterprise and foreign investment took a primary position in the policies of the new military-backed government who came into power following a series of political events, including

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[5] Tsing, 2005

numerous coups, counter coups and famine. The policies of economic growth through privatised venture and foreign investment gained momentum in subsequent periods with the introduction of Special Economic Zones in the 1980s. In continued synergy between state policies and the interest of global capital, the country's natural resources sector, which was managed by the state-owned company PetroBangla, was opened to a multinational resource extraction business in 1993. Within this background an organisational platform emerged in 1998 to protest against initiatives[6] of foreign and multinational corporation gas extraction as this was considered against the national interest and as a profit-seeking scheme for multinational capital.

With a pledge to protect oil and gas resources and national interest from the corporations, a platform was initiated by an alliance of eleven left political parties with the participation of left-leaning academicians, sympathetic intellectuals and professionals. A central committee was formed to expand the organisation across the country and get people involved with their cause. The agenda of the committee was expressed during deliberations in their opening meeting:

> [7]"Multinational company's project of exploring country's oil gas is destroying the country's interest. Dependency on foreign company has to be overcome"

> "Imperialist beasts want to intervene in our resource sector for their profit and the country's ruling group is making their way. People have to stand against it"

> "Bangladesh's oil gas resource is under international conspiracy. Multinational corporations are buying up resource contracts from the government departments destroying national interests. Our agenda is to mobilise people against these contracts designed to loot our natural resources".

> "The stage is set to destroy our state institutions responsible for oil and gas exploration and extraction. State-owned institutions are not developing their technical capacities and experiences as all the potential extraction fields are being leased out to foreign companies. This will lead to a total dependency on the foreign company and destroy our state institutions capacity."

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[6] As mentioned in Chapter Four

[7] As recorded in the "Diary of movement for the protection of Bangladesh's oil gas resource and national interest" (translated from Bengali). Sheikh Shahidullah. Weekly Ekota. Dhaka, August 2009

However, another member of the committee, a senior lawyer without any political affiliation, took a slightly different position and expressed his agenda as follows:

> "The formulation of a national policy and work strategy for natural resource is a most important priority for us at the moment. To secure the country's ever-increasing gas demand it is a must to assess the gas reserve and future domestic demand base. The question of gas extraction conditions and whether it will be exported should be dealt based on the assessment."[8]

Another member, a geological expert, said,

> "There is no specific guideline for the use and extraction of gas. One group of corrupted officials is using this gap to betray the national interest by making contracts with companies that go against the national interest. We have to stand against them and press the government to be transparent about the oil and gas issues."

Clearly, the first set of reflections, dominated by left political expressions, takes a somewhat different position than the latter two in prioritising the agendas. While the first set relates overwhelmingly to perceived exploitation of the foreign and multinational corporations, the second stresses the formulation of effective state policies. Efficient work strategies, such as the assessment of the reserve of natural resources, are stressed in the opinions regarding whether foreign corporations should be allowed to export resources. The first set of statements, on the other hand, denies the foreign company's ventures altogether. It is this kind of difference that characterises the make-up of NC.

Let us return to the history of the NC. The alliance of the left political parties, who initiated the National Committee, was a coalition of eleven left parties that came to an agreement of forming a forum to mobilise people on the issues surrounding the country's natural resource extraction. However, this did not mean that the parties shared the same ideas of foreign investment and economic progress. The historical accounts of Bangladesh presented in Chapter Three locate the political moments within

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[8] "Diary of movement for the protection of Bangladesh's oil gas resource and national interest" (translated from Bengali). Sheikh Shahidullah. Weekly Ekota, Dhaka, August 2009

which several small factions of the left political party had emerged. The oldest of the parties, the Bangladesh Communist Party, has a history of close association with the Awami League, the party that organised and led the War of Independence. This association resulted in the Awami League's post-independence government having an early commitment to socialist traditions of nationalised ventures. However, as I previously discussed, this did not last long as policies gradually moved towards the liberal tradition of privatisation. In the wake of the proliferation of privatisation policies, and the consequent alignment of the country's political and administrative setup[9], the communist party of Bangladesh and its associate organisations faced a crackdown from the (pseudo) military government during late 1970s and early 1980s. Faced with military interventions into party activities and the threat of arrest, the communist party fragmented into different lines of leadership and political strategies. Following the firm establishment of a parliamentary election process after a decade of military-backed government, initiatives were taken from an alliance of left parties during the late 1990s. Eleven of the parties came under a coalition group called "11 Party Alliances" whose purpose was to participate in the parliamentary election as an alliance. Some 'orthodox' left parties didn't come under the alliance, as they didn't support the idea of participating in the electoral process.

Within this background the 11 Party Alliances formed a national forum to deal with the emerging trend of multinational investment in the country's natural resource sector. One central leader of the alliance expressed the character of the forum in the following way:

> "It's a national forum of conscious people. It's a forum to prevent multinational aggression into our natural resources. People of all quarters can come and join us to strengthen our causes. Our goal is to make people aware about what is going on with our resource sector and what should be done.[10]"

When asked whether this was a movement of the left parties he replied,

> "Um…it's a movement led by the left political parties. But our goal is to involve people of all quarters in the movement who can see our causes. We are

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[9] Nature of these realignments presented in Chapter Three

[10] Interview taken during the early days of my involvement in the movement in December 7, 2008

working to disseminate our agendas. People get involved in the movement once they comprehend our agendas".

Developing a national forum required dealing with differences of opinion regarding issues of foreign investment in domestic ventures to make a general cause for the movement. Though the National Committee was initiated by the 11 Party Alliance, other left political parties were invited to join the Committee in an effort to make it a broader political forum concerned with the impact of multinational interest in the natural resource sector. Left parties, both inside and outside the 11 Party Alliance gathered together under the platform of the National Committee to protect oil, gas and the national interest. Despite having a generally anti-multinational political manifesto, the left parties did not share positions on foreign investment in the country's economy. Leaders of one of the major parties in the 11 Party Alliance explained his party's position in the present political and economic setup;

> "We have seen foreign investments usually come through the channel of multinational corporations based in western countries. They use their international liaisons with institutions such as the IMF and World Bank to influence the government in making exploration and extraction contracts against the national interests. This has been the trend we have experienced which was supported by corrupt government officials. Our party position is against these initiatives of making bad contracts by these corporations that destroy our country's economy."

> Q. You said bad contract? Can a good contract be made by the corporations? What is your party's position on such a question?

> A. We have formed an alliance to participate in the electoral process with an aim for social transformation from within. We seek to change the way foreign investors make bad contracts such as the one of Phulbari. Yes, good contracts can be done of course. Why not? If it comes for maximising the national interest and if it matches our need then foreign investment could be brought.

> Q. Can multinational corporations invest if they meet the criteria you said?

A. See, multinationals only see their profits. Their business and investments have to be scrutinized and monitored by specific and transparent national policies to prevent their profit seeking behaviour. Good investment can come.[11]

Similarly, a cautious but affirmative nod to foreign investment is reflected in the published manifesto of the party:

"…to foster the diversified and multi-linear industries it is essential to make the maximum utilisation of domestic resources and human capacities. Measures need to be taken for fostering the domestic capacities and skill for this purpose. First, internal resources need to be identified and accumulated for establishing new enterprises. Foreign funds can be brought and used based on proper need assessment and specific guidelines.[12]"

Other left parties outside the 11 Party Alliance strongly differed in their position on foreign investment. These parties are generally affiliated with radical socialist ideology of social transformation through the mobilisation of the working class. Their political strategies contradict with those of the Alliance as they reject the process of attaining state power through the electoral system. Instead, they aspire to the orthodox Marxist way of altering the power group. To bring their differences into perspective, I followed the conflicting ideas in the sphere of their connection to the National Committee and, more generally, the Phulbari movement. The question of foreign investment is the locale for the dilemma in formulating a general agenda for the National Committee and the movement. Differences in views were expressed in the statement of one party leader as follows:

"Resisting foreign investment and multinationals is our politics. That is what our politics is for. Isn't it? Foreign investment in our country, in the present world system, comes through the channels of western controlled institutions…you know IMF, ADB, or multinational corporations. Foreign investment doesn't do any good for us. They never did. They make us

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[11] Interview taken on May 7, 2010.
[12] From, 17 point strategies. Bangladesh Communist Party. www.cpb.org.bd

dependent on the others. They hinder our own fund accumulation potentials and capacity.[13]"

This difference in opinion was nothing new for the participating parties. However, through the collection of stories and involvement, I explored this predicament from the point of engagement that brought the pre-existing differences to a heightened level and set the table as to where any possible areas of collaboration could be sorted out. The National Committee provided a good opportunity for two groups of politicians to bring their ideas to the table in order to make them noticeable to one another. In its early days National Committee meetings were devoted to making agendas and holding discussions. These discussions facilitated dialogue and tried to appease differences and identify possible ways out. What would the movement's programme be? Are we completely opposed to any foreign investment? Are we only opposed to 'bad investments' such as the one proposed by Asia Energy for the Phulbari coal mine? On occasion these topics brought disputes to such heights that some parties signed off from the committee and relinquished their memberships. However, in the majority of these cases the parties were brought back following further discussion with their allies. While the questions posed relate to wider ideological ideas, discussions were not directed to resolve these disparities. Rather the committee provided a space where parties could explore the rungs of the ladder needed to cross over deep-seated disagreement. With its primary concern being destructive projects and 'rigged' interests of multinational corporations in the country's natural resource sector, the parties were able to gather together and unify under this general cause and existing dilemma.

It is this "empathy"[14] to search for a general cause that runs through the organisation of the Phulbari movement; becoming 'general' requires travelling over the different locus[15]. Intellectuals played an important role in spreading the messages of the movement, leading to it becoming popularly called the movement of left parties and intellectuals. Although the connection between the left parties and the intellectuals is evidenced in this popular expression referring to the movement, this connection is not as straightforward as it seems.

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[13] Informal discussion. June 3, 2010
[14] Tsing, 2005
[15] Jameson, 2002

Forming a solidarity group does not require homogeneity. Alliances between the left political parties, who themselves are fragmented, and the intellectuals involved does not mean that the association was built upon any pre-defined homogeneity. With the exception of academics with formal affiliations to the left parties, other intellectuals had quite different and contrasting political orientations. For example, one of the convenors of the National Committee's founding meeting is a writer, lawyer, and famed leader of a right wing political party that promotes democratic rights. Another writer and National Committee central leader had this to say when asked his political affiliation, "I have my own political approach". A university professor and writer who was part of the National Committee from its early days stated, "…do you think I have to be communist to participate in the movement? It's not a communist movement, is it? No I was never a left politician." Moving away from delving too far into individual political ideas, I explored stories of uncertainties as they grouped together within the platform of the National Committee that was initiated by left politicians; how has this collaboration worked?

Members of the left parties in the National Committee were determined to promote a set of agendas for the movement that matched with left political ideas. Initiated by the left parties, and largely participated in by left political leaders and party representatives, the committee gained the general reputation of being a left-led forum. The leaflets and booklets disseminated by the committee to spread the message of the movement were generally characterised by anti-imperialist language. One of the most widely distributed leaflets, for example, read:

> "We know wherever oil, gas, coal or any natural resources are discovered imperialist countries get busy looting the resources. Imperialist powers are now plotting to loot our resources. Local corrupted officials and politicians are working to implement the order of those imperialist countries. Asia Energy is a hand of those countries that want to make contracts with the government and destroy our natural resources" [16]

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[16]Translated from the leaflet entitled "Phulbari koila khoni: kar khoti kar lav".

Individual political activists from the National Committee appeared on TV and wrote articles for the newspapers to describe Asia Energy's project using similar language[17]. It was a general trend for the testimonies of left political activists published in the media to describe the project in relation to rigged interests of imperialist countries that own Asia Energy and to the corrupt government that cooperates with them. This made the National Committee a widely publicised forum against corrupt government and the policies of global power that control Asia Energy. Such characterisations of the National Committee were publicised as the 'ruling discourses'[18], which became problematic for some sympathetic intellectuals involved with the committee as they did not individually share the same ideas in relation to government corruption and opposition to western countries, as evidenced by one participant I interviewed:

> "It's true that this contract with Asia Energy is very bad. We have to pressurize the government so that they don't go ahead with this contract. Some people in the government are corrupt, but not everyone. My position is not against the government but against the corrupt officials and the policies they endorse."

This testimony suggests a different meaning to the causes of the Phulbari movement; but through this dilemma of meaning an obvious connection to the cause is expressed. This is also exemplified in the case discussed below.

An open anti-western position created a problem for people with affiliations to political parties without anti-western agendas. Publicity framing the National Committee as an anti-western forum resulted in some members distancing themselves from the organisation. For example, a famed writer and lawyer withdrew his membership from the committee due to his position as a senior leader of a right wing party known for promoting democratic rights. For him, as I was told by one of the members of the party, formal membership of the National Committee meant deviating from his own party's position on relations with Western countries.

In other cases, direct anti-government positions caused dilemmas for intellectuals in their other professional commitments as exemplified in the following case. From November 2006 through the end of 2008 Bangladesh experienced some political

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[17] Some of these articles and TV interview can be found in the archives of www.meghbarta.com
[18] Tsing, 2005. p. 175

dramas. It started with the military taking state control and facilitating a new interim government thereby forcing the present interim government to resign. Backed by the military, the new interim government took a somewhat different position on the question of the Phulbari coal mine. They initiated an advisory committee to review the existing policies in relation to the management of coal resources and recommended new policy guidelines based on discussions with different concerned parties and experts. The National Committee was indifferent towards these actions, as they did not result in the government cancelling the existing agreement with Asia Energy. However, a university professor and famed writer who was involved with the National Committee was appointed as a member of the government advisory committee for his expertise in geological matters. The Committee's open anti-government position meant he had to choose between this new position and his affiliation with the National Committee. Instead of protesting against the government he decided he would do better by trying to influence coal policies through a government advisory position; he was therefore unable to continue his formal association with the National Committee.

Coal policy[19] is a government document that sets out specific policies and guidelines regarding matters related to coal explorations, extractions and its use. The Department of Energy and Mineral Sources is officially responsible for setting out the policy guidelines that direct the government's decisions on coal resource management, including issues of extraction contracts with multinational corporations. The first draft of the coal policy was initiated in 2006 and was opposed by the National Committee as it was found to be against the national interest. The key areas of the coal policy that the Committee found particularly damaging for the country were the provisions of exporting coal, no bar for leasing out mines to foreign corporations, and the provision of the open-pit method[20] for the mines. The National Committee put forward a three point core agenda which was proclaimed on the banners and leaflets on display at most Phulbari movement processions and protest meetings; "no to open-pit method, no to foreign, no to export". As previously discussed, Asia Energy proposed an open-pit method for extracting coal involving the removal of soil and digging pits of up to 270 meters. Asia Energy estimated the total area needed for digging pits and dumping coal

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[19]Source: Bangladesh Oil Gas and Mineral Recourse Corporation (Petrobangla)
http://www.petrobangla.org.bd/

at 5,933 hectares, or roughly 60 sq km. In addition, the use of the land for these purposes required the movement of all people living in the area. This open pit method was chosen despite the availability of the underground method, where coal is extracted by digging tunnels underground, leaving the above land and its people unharmed.

The National Committee opposed this project on the basis of its provision of exporting coal to other countries, as the exportation was seen as depriving the country of resources for much needed electricity production. The National Committee's analysis of the Phulbari coal project depicted Asia Energy as a Western profit seeking entity. The committee continued to protest against Asia Energy and against the government who was putting the Phulbari project agenda forward. A new political scenario saw an interim government put into place at the end of 2006, and the newly formed advisory committee was given the responsibility to review and finalise the coal policy. The establishment of this kind of committee was nothing new; the draft of the coal policy was initiated after a number of reviews by several committees but in this new political setup, a professor was able to explore enabling areas of making connections with the movement agenda. In the reorganised government structure, such as the change in the ministerial positions, the advisory committee decided to hold a discussion with the National Committee regarding the revision of the coal policy. This presented an opportunity for the members of the committee and the professor to identify a point of solidarity within their two different practicalities.

Reflecting on the agendas of the National Committee, the professor put his view into the coal policy revision process. The advisory committee accepted the idea of barring coal export leaving the other two provisions, foreign corporations and open-pit mining, unchanged. The revised draft also enacted the National Committee's recommendation of setting up a national coal body for coal exploration and extraction. So, although the revised draft policy only partially responded to the demands of the National Committee, the process explored how solidarity could be generated and expressed between deviated positions within different practicalities. As one National Committee leader said of the professor, "He had done his best from his position. He knows how bad the Phulbari project is. He writes about it. He pressed the Phulbari movement agendas in the coal policy revisions. He might not agree on everything we say but he is with us."

Solidarity does not mean that everyone has to stand on one line without any deviation. Rather, deviation may open up possibilities for new grounds of solidarities. The new role of the Professor in the interim government enabled him to explore areas where his government advisory position could connect to the agendas of the National Committee. Developing a revised coal management policy for the government provided the link where a connection could be made and solidarity could be expressed. It was an unexpected link, as the National Committee had the least optimism that the military-backed interim government would do any better than the previous ones. However, the linkages worked as evidenced by the testimonies and stories of some intellectuals' on the possible areas of connection leaving beside the discrepant elements of positionalities.

This feature of linkages in the organisation of the Phulbari movement helps us to trace the frictional ways in which wider collaboration in the movement took place through negotiations between incongruent forms of knowledge in search of a 'general' one.

The environment in the Phulbari movement has been a site of such processes, as is explored in the next part of this chapter. I attend to the process of how distinct experiences of environment get in the way of making the ideas of the movement stronger. I explore this by focusing on the particular case of collaboration between Bangladesh Paribesh Andolon, the Bangladesh Environment Movement, or BAPA, an environmental campaign and advocacy organisation based in the capital, and the 'locals', in this case meaning those residing in Borogram village. I will look at how environment as a tool of protest stimulates collaboration between disparate groups and experiences

2. Tentative collaboration

BAPA's efforts to stand against the projected environmental degradation that would be caused by the Phulbari mine involved periodic visits to the villages in the mine sites, protest meetings in the capital and internet campaigns to disseminate the issues of the environmental threat[21]. Their participation in the events of August 2006 was followed by discussions with village groups to express solidarity and cooperation in the movement against the environmental degradation that could be caused by Asia

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[21] For BAPA's list of protest and campaign civilities see www.bapa.org.bd

Energy's open-pit coal project. They were viewed, as observed by a village activist in Borogram, as a group wanting to help local people protect their environment. Since the closing down of the Phulbari offices of the Asia Energy Corporation following the events of August 2006 their involvement in the movement has shifted to national level protests and meetings that they organise periodically in the capital. I discuss the nature of their involvement in the movement based on an analysis of the stories of their interaction in the villages and their participation in the Dhaka-based activism.

Efforts to protect the environment are relatively recent in Bangladesh and have developed mainly through the activities of national and international development organisations and 'civil society' activists. This can be traced back to the 1980s when a handful of NGOs emerged with environmental protection as their main agenda. During that period the Bangladeshi government also responded to growing non-governmental efforts for the environment by establishing a separate Ministry for Environment and Forests (MoEF), which replaced the smaller Department of Environment and Pollution Control (DEPC) under the Ministry of Local Affairs. These developments at the national level were accompanied by numerous issues, global and local, which triggered the rise of environmental concerns[22]. It was during the 1980s that local environmental degradation issues became prominent; rapidly disappearing forests, wetlands and open spaces, the problem of industrial waste, chemical run-off to surface water bodies, urban air pollution and loss of biodiversity, were the most common issues that were focused on[23]. In the eighties environmental issues received a lot of attention in developed countries, leading to the establishment of a cross-national dialogue about the environment and, consequently, the channelling of resources by aid agencies to 'developing' countries.

 In Bangladesh, the UN sponsored numerous processes of inter-governmental deliberation for reaching agreements on environmental issues. International NGOs also started to pay a lot of attention to this issue. In response, the Ministry of Environment formed the National Environment Management Acton Plan (NEMAP) with participation from NGOs and other "civil society" organisations. Institutions like UNDP, the Asian Development Bank and the World Bank also started to fund various

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[22] Islam, 2005
[23] Islam, 2005

projects to protect the environment. The 1980s can be marked by the growth of a 'participatory approach' to development initiatives in Bangladesh and ideas of 'participation' became a key strategy for environmental protection projects. One such example is USAID's participatory forest management project in Chittagong Hill tracts, where community members' knowledge of local environmental conditions was applied to the protection of forests and communities through their participation in decision-making and protection efforts. The participation of different groups in the environmental agenda is now a defining character of environmental discourse in Bangladesh. Within this background BAPA was established as an organisation with a commitment to protecting the environment.

BAPA has its origins in a community organisation called POROSH that was formed in 1997 by a group of senior professionals, along with a few Dhaka-based personalities famed for their attachment with issues surrounding human rights and the environment, concerned with the pollution in Dhaka city. At the time, industrial pollution in Dhaka's river Buriganga was an issue of regular discussion in the national media and the two-stroke engine of auto-rickshaws contributed to putting Dhaka in the top half of the list of the world's most polluted cities. This was also during the time when the environment and its protection emerged as an essential theme in the auspices of international organisations and their domestic partners who made promises for human wellbeing. The background of environmentalist efforts in Bangladesh, as presented above, suggests that the development of concern for Bangladesh's environment is related to international processes and transnational ideas generally characterised by a global commitment for the protection of forests, wetlands, open spaces, biodiversity and apprehension regarding the pollution of urban air and water bodies[24].

In synergy with international ideas of the environment that matched reported environmental concerns for Dhaka, city members of POROSH took the initiative to transform their community organisation into a wider forum for environmental campaign and advocacy. In January of 2000 they organised an international conference held in Dhaka with the participation of environmental organisations in Bangladesh and neighbouring countries, as well as members of the Bangladesh Environment Network (BEN), an online environment campaign initiated and operated by US-based non-

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[24] Islam, 2005

resident Bangladeshis. The conference led to the formation of BAPA made up of representatives from the participating organisations with a goal to influence environmentally related projects and policies through rallies, meetings, systematic analysis of environmental impacts, and the communication of these analyses with a broader audience. International groups and campaigns, such as the World Bank watch[25], collaborate with BAPA in sharing information and knowledge on specific projects. BAPA uses the internet as a space for international discussions on environmental issues. Through its blog portal, BAPA is linked to various online campaigns and groups concerned with the environment[26]. The environmental languages of BAPA suggest synergies with the international environmental agendas. BAPA's programme introduction as written in its brochure states, *"The environment of Bangladesh is deteriorating fast. Urban air quality is plummeting. Ground water is contaminated. Surface water bodies are getting polluted, encroached, and degraded. Solid, fluid, gaseous, and hazardous wastes are overflowing. Forests and open spaces are disappearing. Noise is increasing. Bio-diversity is vanishing. Health conditions are worsening due to pollution."* This synergy suggests that BAPA's motivation for 'global' environmental concerns have been inspired in order to engage with the Phulbari movement.

Strategies of encounter bring possibilities of cooperation and collaboration. Particular issues of protests direct the search for spaces of collaboration. Members of the National Committee observed BAPA as a non-governmental organisation as it collaborated on campaigns with other NGOs that work internationally, such as BRAC[27]. Historically, left political parties had a generally anti-NGO stance as the growth of NGOs in Bangladesh was related to the proliferation of 'privatisation' policies in Bangladesh. As discussed in the Third Chapter, the first government of an independent Bangladesh in 1971 adopted certain socialist traditions, such as the nationalisation of industries, which gradually shifted towards the policies of privatisation. During the late 1970s and 1980s government policies were aligned according to the suggestions of international financial institutions that provided Bangladesh with aid, a large part of which was

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[25] The World Bank Watch is an international online campaign that monitor the impact of projects supported /endorsed by the international financial institutions such as the World Bank
[26] See http://blog.bapa.org.bd/
[27] Bangladesh Rural Advancement Committee. The largest NGO in Bangladesh that works in total ten countries in the regions of Asia, Africa and South America with its affiliated offices in the UK and USA and headquarters in Dhaka, Bangladesh.

channelled through NGOs[28]. The availability of donor funds prompted a growth of NGOs in Bangladesh during that period[29]. This history is often drawn on by the left parties in their observations of NGOs and is observed as being essentially related to international donors whose suggestions of privatisation policies took Bangladesh away from its early commitment to socialist tradition[30]. A look at the published manifestos of the parties that are represented in the National Committee would reveal this general anti-NGO political position[31]. However, there are stories that often "fall away" from the published proclamation[32]. Specific tools of protest open up possibilities of contingent collaboration. Concerns regarding the environment as a tool of protest provided a stage where both the National Committee and BAPA looked for possible areas of collaboration, although tentatively, as one activist of the National Committee noted, *"Its not that we cuddled BAPA really. Its like, ok, lets see what they could do for the movement"*.

> "We are concerned about environmental degradation in Phulbari…We collaborate with the people protesting against the Phulbari project because the mine would have a negative impact on the environment. We work together on this point," - Organiser of BAPA.

BAPA and NC needed to find common ground for engagement in the movement, which had been initiated at the national level by left political activists. 'Ruling discourses' of the movement, as we have seen in the previous section, were characterised by left political languages. Messages and agendas of the National Committee were disseminated to villages in the planned mining areas through regular meetings and village discussions. BAPA looked for spaces to engage in the existing channels of communication between the villages and city-based activists. Movement concerns for the local environment provided a space that could be tapped for reaching out to the villages. Agendas put forward by the National Committee were carefully sorted out to identify compatible areas for involvement. The organisation's

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[28] Kabeer and Guillermo, 2010

[29]During 1990s the number of NGOs registered in Bangladesh rose from 395 to 1223 with twelve percent increased aid channeled to them. (Devine, 2003. pp. 227-42); See Also, Wood and Sharif, 1997

[30] Karim, 2001; Wood (2007) suggests that NGOs development agenda, inspired by western discourse of 'human development', are "manoeuvred into being treacherous and anti-nationalist' in 'respective political missions' in Bangladesh. p. 31

[31] See, for example, web portal of Bangladesh communist party (www.cpb.org,bd).

[32] Tadiar, 2009

positionalities were expressed in its compatibility searching efforts as demonstrated by one organiser's comment,

> "See we are not a political party nor are we anti government or anti-western. Our goal is to analyse specific projects and concerns and the impact they could have on the environment and then try to facilitate the decision-making process of the organisations or companies responsible for it. Rather than being grossly anti-western we talk about the particular project and its problems. We and the National Committee are in agreement on many issues about Phulbari project's possible impact on environment."

Within the dominant languages of the Phulbari movement that were characterised by anti-foreign and anti-western opinions, BAPA acted on specific compatible agendas about the environment. Their environmental concerns for the Phulbari project were expressed generally around issues of forest destruction in the planned mining areas, and the pollution of air and water. BAPA's analyses of forest destruction and the impacts of the open-pit method were communicated with village groups in an effort to learn and exchange views about the local environment. They quoted villagers' stories and testimonies of worries about the local habitat in protest meetings. This appears as a smooth collaboration between the village groups and BAPA in protecting village habitats where BAPA takes the concerns for local environment to the wider networks of protests. However, the dilemma inherent in this kind collaboration was revealed when I explored the 'local' meaning of environment as negotiated in the collaborative efforts. Here I focus particularly on the ideas of forest in Borogram village as this was campaigned as a local environmental concern in BAPA's protest agendas.

As discussed at length in Chapter Five, Borogram village was established by migrants from the northern regions of Bangladesh who were forced from their homes by the erosion of the river. The people from neighbouring areas gradually moved to Phulbari area and settled in unoccupied flat forest land that they cleared and made arable. For Borogram people the idea of the forest is related to their experience of settlement in the village. This is seen in the statement of one elderly Borogram resident who spoke about his memories and ideas of forests:

"When I came here first I got scared by the scenes of this place. I couldn't believe I had to live here. It was full of trees and uneven lands. But at least there were lands…though forest. I worked hard to clear forests for cultivation. The people who came with me to this place all worked hard to gradually clear this area. Now you see it's so nice and flat. We have land; we produce crops. Who would have believed that it was possible in this place?"

He looked over the farmland he possessed to the remaining forest lines that started on the edge of his lands and continued, *"…forest officials gave us trouble in the early periods of this village. They used to come to the village to threaten us…to take money from us. We had to bribe them otherwise they used to file police cases against us. They told us we were destroying forests. We were destroying the country's resource"*. He then directed me to the trees in the forest land and said, *"Can you tell me what the country gets from those trees? In our country the forest officials and their favoured people steal it all! The land we have cleared here produces rice and crops. Don't we need rice? Who should come first, forest or people?"*

This seemingly simple question was not raised with the members of BAPA when they came to the village to discuss the importance of forests and the dangers of its loss to the surrounding areas as a result of the planned mining. Clearing forest land meant new opportunities for the people of Borogram as they moved to the 'new place', as was the case for Salek Mia. Salek Mia planted fifty mango trees on the land two years ago with his hard earned income from selling vegetables produced on this land. His father worked hard to make the forest land arable, and he worked hard for the last two years nurturing his mango garden hoping for a good return by selling the mangoes when the trees start producing. '*Just two more years brother; you will see a different face in my garden; it will be full of mangos.*-says Salek Mia.

Economic opportunities of this kind are accompanied by the social value of forest free land in Borogram. For example, land is also required as a playground for the increasing number of young children in the village. Sports, such as football, require large *maaths* (playing fields) and the absence of enough *maath* means the young children would have to go outside of the village to play. This involves the risk of conflicts between the children of Borogram and those in the village where they go to play over claims to the playing field. It would also be considered a disgrace for the Borogram 'community' to

not have enough play ground for their children who would be made to go to other villages to play. In absence of enough *maath* for children people challenge the value of some of the remaining forests occupying the land in front of the local primary school. Khalek Sarker of Borogram resents the forest

> "What is the value of those trees standing there in front of the school occupying the land when our children can't find field to play? It's not right that a big village like Borogram don't have at least four or five maaths. We hardly have one or two. Our children go outside the village and often get into conflicts trying to manage a playing field. And these trees here…. I don't know who are they for?"

When agricultural and social opportunities are perceived to be restrained by the forest, environmental protection is a "remote concern"[33] for the people of Borogram. Historically, residents of Borogram experienced conflict and the threat of arrest from government forest officials who claimed to be protectors of the forest, but they discovered new opportunities in the forest protection claims of this new group who was protesting against the mining. They made use of the available forces to make their anti-mining claim stronger. Collaboration between BAPA and the community groups was not just simple learning and sharing about the environment; rather it was an exercise where community groups could identify the claims of forest protection as a tool to use for making their claims against mining. To do this they looked for "spaces of compatibility" despite having distinct and different experiences of the forest. One resident said,

> "BAPA people said mining would destroy the forest and if there were no forest the neighbouring areas would become hotter. They said there would be less rain. Company [Asia Energy] people said they would give us home in neighbouring areas. They told us they would build houses for everyone living here. If they destroy all forest here and if there is less rain then wouldn't it be difficult for us? There is already very dry land here. We need lots of irrigation during dry season. Even the company people don't give us anything and if we have to move from this place we have to find land somewhere nearby. We know

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[33] Shah, 2007. p. 1825

only farming. We have to live on farming. We don't know any other place. We only know these areas. If they destroy forests and if there is less rain wouldn't it be hard to cultivate land? If we can't cultivate land what would we eat?"

In this way, the importance of the forest gets local purchase and forest, as an element of the environment, becomes the site of collaboration. It is now common in Borogram that banners displaying messages of forest protection hang in public places, such as the village market. This is a new thing in the village as one said, *"People now know what to say against the mining. BAPA people and others come and talk about the forest and environment. Mining can't destroy our forests"*. In this way, the forest is turned from a problem to a means for developing new tools for anti-mining protests. Collaboration between BAPA and community groups enable the latter, with their disparate historical experience and views about the elements of environment, to connect to the discourses of environment held by organisations with 'global' linkages. This "tentative and contingent collaboration" between disparate experiences acts in establishing an "axiom of unity" that opens up possibilities of wider network[34].

Conclusion

As I participated in the daily life of Borogram I explored distinct social-realities, as discussed in Chapter Six (Part One), that stimulate the villagers concerns about the proposed mine. How did the ideas of the movement spread so successfully over the distinct realities and observations? The movement has so far been successful in forcing a halt to the mine project. The August 2006 protest in Phulbari town, participated in by local villagers, national activists and environmental organisations, such as BAPA, forced Asia Energy to close down their local offices. Since then the movement has successfully prevented the reopening of these local offices. How did different groups become so unified in opposing the mining project? On the one hand, I tried to establish that unification doesn't mean homogeneity and, on the other, that difference doesn't stop collaboration.

I have discussed that the National Committee, the organising committee that facilitates the movement on the national scale, is an example of how alliances for the movement implies an "empathy" for finding general causes for groups with different views on

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[34] Tsing, 2005. p. 89

certain ideas of the movement. Certain opposing views, such as the observations of the limits of foreign investment, are brought to the table not to erase the differences, but to establish alliances based on a common anti-Asia Energy position in the particular case of the Phulbari mine project. This feature of contingent collaboration is characterised in the network of actors in the movement. The environment as a language of movement is worked-out to find the local purchase and, thus, to be used as a general tool of protest for disparate groups. Despite having incompatible experiences of the importance of the forest, the village people discovered a local compatibility of forest protection so that the forest, as an element of the environment, could be used to make the protest stronger. The environment has thus become a site for this kind of tentative collaboration between village people and an environmental organisation with global linkages. It is this search for an "axiom of unity" between disparate groups and observations at different levels that opens up the possibilities of a wider network of the Phulbari movement. It is not a network of groups with uniform ideas, as it may initially seem.

Chapter Eight

Conclusion

This thesis has followed in the spirit of scholars whose analyses disrupt the smooth flow of ideas of the 'global' era. As James Ferguson has written, 'one cannot expect things to simply snap into place through some mysterious black box mechanism'[1]. The diverse and more open forms of interaction are characteristic to these analyses. 'Global connection[s]', Anna Tsing observes, 'turn out to be less controllable than those at the top imply. Making claims about scale, including globalization, turns out to be an arena of contention'[2]. I locate this fragmented and contentious feature of the circulation of ideas in the spread of the resistance movement against the Phulbari mining project. This thesis has, on the one hand, followed particular forms of experience, aspiration and ideas of the village groups located at a mining site, as well as those of national activists and an environmental group involved in the movement. On the other hand, this thesis has aimed to show how the connection and disjuncture of these particularities account for creating space for the formulation of political coalition.

This concluding chapter draws on the themes which have emerged within this thesis to identify what this work has recognised in the spread of the resistance movement against the mining project in Phulbari.

Where is my 'field'? I had to confront this question while designing the conceptual structure of my 'fieldwork'. I dealt with this question as my field sites were 'envisaged' through the process of my engagement with the field. This is the theme of the discussions in the first part of **Chapter Two** where I reflect on some of the possibilities and challenges of multi-sited research and relate them to my engagements with more than one location. I discuss how, in the end, my ethnographic endeavour in multiple locations conforms to anthropology's traditional focus on situated realities and 'relations'. Though the limitations of time and space require that the extent of the depth of focus in the sites have to be varied to allow for the wider ethnographic perspective,

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[1] Ferguson, 1990. p. 13
[2] Tsing, 2005. p. 271

in pursuit of this wider ethnographic perspective, I have engaged with the activism in the capital Dhaka, as well as the everyday life of Borogram village.

By taking on the possibilities of a multi-sited approach, where researchers move between multiple locations, I was able to follow the realities that shape local resistance in Borogram, as well as at the national level. It is only through following the ethnographic fundamentals of contextualisation that the realities at different locations and relations between them were possible to identify. To this end, multi-sited ethnography entails an updated approach to methodologically respond to the supposed 'connectedness' of this era.

How does my role as a Bangladeshi ethnographer interfere in the process of representation? I have examined the researcher's 'subjectivity' concerning the tradition of ethnographic fieldwork. I have situated my 'indigenous' qualities, i.e. my social background, supposed familiarity with the elements of 'local' culture such as the language, etc., within the social context of Borogram village and postulated whether it is possible to overcome the researchers identity as an 'outsider' be they 'indigenous' or not. Reflecting on the kinds of relations I experienced during my fieldwork in Borogram, I have argued that the essentialisation of the researcher's positionality (i.e. 'native'/ 'non-native') is problematic.

To drive my arguments I have drawn on historical relations. **Chapter Three** has described the historical background of the political processes of Bangladesh to gain a better appreciation of the background of the current socio-political environment in which the movement against the mine operates. I have drawn on the history of the intelligentsia and its role in forming nationalist ideas, struggle over land, the collective image of a foreign company as formed by the 'unrequited trade'[3] of the East India Company and neoliberal reform from which Phulbari resistance came. These historical relations inform the development of nationalist discourses that play a central role in the dissent surrounding mining in Bangladesh. Drawing on the historical context I have discussed how 'nationalism' in Bangladesh did not take a modular form. I have shown how the varying socio-political inspirations contained in the imagination of the nation address the political conditions through which the anti-mine protests function.

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[3] Robins, 2006. p. 76

The violent reactions from police and paramilitary forces during the events of August 26, 2006 sparked the protesters to hold *hartal* in Phulbari until the corporation's local offices were withdrawn and the government had declared postponement of the contract. The ongoing protests against the proposal of mining in Phulbari were observed in the analysis of activists from the National Committee. The National Committee was responsible for organising the protests at the national level; representing the people's resistance to a global force, pitting the 'national' interest against the exploitative multinational corporation.One unpublished protest document from the National Committee reads,

> "…on August 26, 2006, people gathered in Phulbari to attend the protest organised by the National Committee to mark their opposition to the Asia Energy Corporation and it's mining plan…Since coal has been discovered in Phulbari a conspiracy to loot it has begun. Plans have been set up to establish a coal mine to serve the interests of this multinational corporation. People gathered in Phulbari on the 26th to protect the national interest from the conspiracy of the corporations"[4]. 'People of Phulbari', writes activist Akmal Hossain, 'stood up to protest to protect their land and the national interest. They resisted the initiatives of mining because they have become conscious of the national interest"[5].

This portrait of the protest generalises the resistance to the mine in terms of an easy proposition of national interest and hides the internal complexities of the organisation and the spread of the movement. **Chapter Four** has focused on the idioms and sentiments of 'nationalism' that shape the dissent around the Phulbari mine project. The chapter is devoted to exploring how they attend to varied, and sometimes conflicting, ideas of 'national interests'. This is explored through historical and specific evidence of the context of the Phulbari movement. I have investigated the lines and intersections of the conflict as the national interest is projected and played out in the protests. I have shown how the differences start to coalesce under a banner of 'anti-Asia Energy' as a

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[4] From unpublished protest documents entitled "Bablu ray ebong Phulbarir ashomapto galpo (Bablu Ray and the unfinished story of Phulbari)".
[5]Phulbari ganobishforon amader jalani nirapottar jonno (Phulbari uprising is for our energy security). From the official website of the National Committee http://www.protectresourcesbd.org/

way to think about nationalism, covering the 'cleavages'[6] in it and creating common ground for protests.

At the local level, 'anti-mining' takes on a different meaning. Details of the context of social relations and the make-up of Borogram village, as presented in **Chapter Five,** provide a background for this discussion. Contrary to some early analyses of the Bangladeshi rural structure, where social politics was conceived in terms of an inflexible structure where accumulation , and control over, land were seen as the sole determinants of power[7], the case of Borogram has showed how people assert power from their own position within multi-linear social relations. New lines of social relations emerge based on alternate livelihood means, such as irrigations technology, where no one possesses absolute power over others. While the owner of an irrigation machine experiences newly acquired power to control irrigation services, the success of his venture depends on a mutual dependency between the machine owner and the small producers or water receivers. This signifies a "diffused"[8] nature of power shaped by 'personalised' relations in Borogram. These relations are maintained through the collective membership of the 'community', which people of Borogram called Chapai *Samaj,* built around relations of trust and faith and supported by social and religious norms administered through the informal system of judging the nonconformity, or *bichar.* The functioning of Samaj, thus, implies multiple lines of social relations and 'overlapping obligations'[9], an aspect which plays a significant role in shaping resistance in Borogram (Chapter Six, Part One).

In **Chapter Six** (Part One), I have explored how 'local' resistance to the mine is embedded in the socio-political complexities of the village where the mining is planned. I have discussed how the notion of land rights, that are often characterised by a longer-term presence on the land and therefore have an uneasy relation with the official recognition of land rights, relates to the 'inner' spheres of resistance in the village of Borogram. I have shown how anxieties derived from the threat of the loss of certain 'social resources', such as *Samman* (status) and 'inclusion in networks'[10] in the 'community' provokes resistance to the mine. I have presented ethnographic evidence

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[6] Chatterjee, 1993
[7] See, Arens and Van Beurden, 1977; Jahangir, 1982; and Hartman and Boyce, 1983
[8] Gardner, 1995. p.103
[9] Wood, 2005. p. 16
[10] Wood, 2005. p. 5

that shows how individual resistance is inspired by the causes of a 'private nature' that often remain unexpressed in public discussions of protests in the village. Samman is built upon generational community relations and the access to credit mediated by social networks and factors, such as the anxiety of losing security for the women, form people's resistance to their possible displacement as a result of the planned mine development.

 'Local' resistance is, thus, rooted in the spheres of 'multi-dimensional relationships' in the 'community'. Through these relationships 'people come to know their place and their possibilities'[11]; the possibilities of 'multi-transactional ties' and associated obligations and expectations that, according to Wood, shape the 'forms of social capital'[12]. The concept of 'social capital' implies that these possibilities provide an important perspective for understanding the stories of resistance that often 'fall away'[13] from the public discourse of protests. As we have seen, a host of 'private' anxieties derived from the threat of the breakdown of 'home' built around 'multiple ties', longer term presence and accompanying rights and claims, are at play.

On another level, resistance builds upon the 'moral commitment'[14] for the control of the benefits and opportunities that result from the protests against the proposed mine. In the second part of Chapter Six, I have discussed how the development of the movement in Phulbari town is influenced by localised politics. I have discussed how the promise of becoming a voice for the people as an elected representative of the state system is at play. Desire for the benefits that can arise from mine development activity, such as opportunities to employ people by obtaining a contract from the company, interfere with the 'moral purpose'[15] of the protests. Groups and actors call upon their 'own moral framework'[16] to rationalise their protests for which a simple standard of assessment, "greed versus grievance"[17], is inadequate. The stories that inform the moral purpose of

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[11] Blaxter and Hughes, 2000. p. 105
[12] Wood, 2005. p. 5, 16
[13] Tadiar, 2009
[14] Welker, 2002
[15] Welker, 2002
[16] Welker, 2002
[17] Collier and Hoeffler, 2000

the protests are discrepant; it is, I have argued, only through the recognition of these discrepancies that we can scratch the surface of the 'local dynamics'[18] of the protests.

If local resistance is rooted in social dynamics then how do village groups in the actual mining site, who are threatened by displacement from their land, place themselves within the ideas attached to the national protesters? To present this answer I will go back to the testimonies of Salek Mia in Borogram village:

> [19]Salek Mia looked over his piece of land adjacent to his house where he planted fifty mango trees. 'This mining matter is threatening my plan of making profit from this garden' he said with anxiety. *'Why will we allow a foreign company to come to our place and take away our land when they will take all the profit to their country? We will never leave this place'.*
>
> 'How about a national company?'
>
> *'A national company will at least keep the profit in our country. So it's better.'*
>
> 'So you mean you will allow a national company to mine here?'
>
> *'A national company should understand our problem, shouldn't they? They should not mine here as it will harm our place. Why can't they find any other place where there are no people living. They should explore other places. We don't want any mining in our place.'*

These testimonies offer insights into how lived realities drive the forces of local resistance and how they can place perceived local and national interest as incompatible. While the proposal of mining by a state-owned company using the underground method[20] is observed as being compliant with the national interest by the National Committee, as is evident in its protest agendas and protest documents, the local community is opposed to any kind of mining in their village. As discussed in Chapter Six, the stories of misery shared by people affected by landslides and the uncertainties of getting compensation from a state-owned underground coal mine in Borogram's neighbouring villages, add to the people's opposition to any kind of mining, whether

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[18] Ferguson, 2006
[19] December 30, 2009. Borogram village.
[20] Underground method follows a process of coal extraction through making underground tunnel without displacing people from surface.

national or foreign. Here the National Committee's ideas of national interest become entangled with observed local interest. Yet, village groups in Borogram regularly participated in protest activities organised by National Committee activists. Those from the Phulbari branch of the National Committee expressed that Borogram became one of their stronger points for their '*hat*' (village market) discussions, where villagers and activists gather in the village market to share and discuss protests agendas. One of the activists said, *"You must have noticed people participate in our hat meetings in big numbers there. Anti-mining emotion runs high there."* Referring resident's history of land loss from river erosion and subsequent migration to the 'new place'[21] he observed, *'they have no place to go if they are displaced from here. They have no other way than to resist. We find very good cooperation from the village."* I asked him if he thought people would be happy to accept an underground mining proposal by a state-owned company, to which he replied, *"This has become an issue…people are actually against any kind of mining. We need to discuss with the village people more to exchange our views. We need to discuss within ourselves as well as to how we can respond to this issue."*

The 'local' and 'national' become intertwined by this drive to find allies in forcing their respective causes. At some point local interest conflicts with the national, and at other points they converge around specific agendas of resistance to the mining project in Phulbari. The anxieties and observations presented by Salek Mia do not always match with the concerns of national interest as expressed by the national protesters. However, local people use the means and ideas of national activism to force their demands, in the same way that the national protesters continually strive to find spaces of engagement.

The protest language of the National Committee, the leading organising group of the Phulbari movement, is characterised by antipathy towards multinational capital and foreign (western) investment. The National Committee was initiated by a group of left-political party members and involved intellectuals and sympathetic professionals. An apparent left-oriented National Committee operated through an alliance of the members of political parties and individuals who did not bring uniform observations about the aspects of the movement. The limits and conditions of foreign investment, for example, were contentious issues as some left political parties and professionals applied

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[21] The history is presented in Chapter Five.

suggestions of differentiating between 'good investment' and 'bad investment', while others stressed complete opposition to foreign investment. These differences, as we have seen, did not deter the building of the alliance against the mine as they strived to find common causes.

This feature of contingent alliances allows, as I have shown in **Chapter Seven**, collaboration between the protesters and the groups with 'universalist' ideas. To explore this kind of collaboration I looked at collaborative efforts between an environmental group, the national protesters and local people. I focused on a particular environmental campaign group (BAPA) in the capital of Bangladesh to allow extensive ethnographic details. The collaboration between the National Committee and BAPA, as we have seen, emerged out of each other's desire to find compatible forces for the movement. BAPA, which has its origin in the universal processes of environmental concerns, and its network within a transnational web of environmentalism, and the National Committee communicate and collaborate with each other on agreeable agendas of the protests where environmental concerns become the point of agreement. While BAPA does not take any position on certain protest agendas, such as opposition to mining contracts with foreign companies, environmental concerns become a space of limited agreement.

In the same spirit, the environmental group BAPA facilitates the conjuncture where differences in experiences and observation of forest conservation between the 'community' and BAPA turned into possibilities of finding "space for the formulation of new, unexpected coalition"[22]. Environmental discourse provides that space allowing the community to use the environment as a new tool for protests. The community's experience and struggle for the possession of land and the clearing of the forest conflicts with BAPA's ideas of forest conservation. However, those same people find that ideas of forest conservation are compatible for their cause arising at the suitable logic that drought may arise out of the forest destruction for the mine. Though clearing forests for the possession of land has been the main strategy for the establishment of Borogram village, banners opposing the open-pit mine in the name of forest conservation, as provided by BAPA, hang in the local shops. Local people and the

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[22] Hajer, 1995. p. 59

environmental group make their "misunderstandings…productive"[23] as the 'friction' of different ideas and observations only open up the possibilities of finding common grounds of protests. The network of resistance extends over tentative yet productive common ground.

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The movement against the mine developed based on a set of, what Maarten Hajer called, 'storey-lines' that "provide actors with a set of symbolic reference[s]" that suggest commonality"[24]. Hajer's concept of storey-lines refers to narratives of social reality that plays a role in the clustering of knowledge and the positioning of actors, which, ultimately, creates a space for coalition. It refers to a set of ideas and concepts that provide the possibility for communicative networks among "actors with different or at best overlapping perception and understanding"[25]. In the Phulbari movement the narratives of national interests emerge accommodating different understandings and observations of mining. Differential observations of the mining method, foreign investment and the issues of mineral export are all concerned with how things should be in relation to the mineral industry in Bangladesh. Different opinions of how things should be find a way to fit into the narratives of national interests to secure support for their observation. National interests work as 'discursive cement'[26] in the communicative networks of different, and often conflicting, observations. Similarly, the concept of the environment plays such a role of discursive cement in forming the coalition between the actors, as exemplified in the interaction between the people in Borogram and the environmental group. The concept of forest conservation provides the actors in Borogram with ideas to "select and adapt thoughts, mutate and create them"[27] in their favour and to find suitable tools of protests. The Phulbari movement does not have uniform goals, choices and interest, yet it operates on a network characterised by 'discontinuity and awkward connection'[28].

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[23] Tsing, 2005. p. 272
[24] Hajer, 1995
[25] Hajer, 1995. p. 63
[26] Hajer, 1995. p. 63
[27] Billig, 1989. p. 82
[28] Tsing, 2005

Social movement processes, as the case of the Phulbari movement illustrates, entail a connection between 'differently-framed agendas'[29]. This is not a process of smooth connection; 'friction' is central to it. As the 'cultural politics'[30] approach to social movements has suggested, people mobilize collectively on the grounds of very different sets of meanings, stakes and practices. Political coalitions and alliances between sets of actors, who perceive their position and interests differently, are formed based on 'common discourses' of protests where contradicting practices and observations find a meaning in a common political project[31]. Narratives of national interest or environment form such common discourses in the protests against the mine in Phulbari and the "conscious use" of these narratives is part of building a network of resistance[32].

A central concern, in writing this thesis, has been to counter the representation of the protests against the mine in Phulbari as a uniform movement against the global mining corporations. Instead, I have shown that the dynamics of the movement need to be understood in relation to the socio-political processes and the ideas that configure the situated practices of the protests. As I have argued, the ideas that shape the organisation of the Phulbari movement are neither uniform nor disconnected; the movement spreads through the simultaneous processes of conflict and collaboration between different ideas and observations.

Such terrains of strategic collaboration on the part of the village people whose land and livelihoods are threatened by the mine are not limited to the patterns of everyday resistance that Scott[33] has drawn our attention to some years ago. The protest movement builds as people transform their resistance rooted in everyday life to adopt tools for more overt protests. Recognising aspects of everyday resistance is essential to understanding the social and historical contexts that drive strategies for more elaborate protests. To this end, the concept of social capital provides us with an important perspective to understand how local resistance is rooted in social experience as it applies to certain narratives of the protest movement, such as the destruction of land and environment. If contemporary mobilisations are of a diffused nature and involve

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[29] Leach and Scoones, 2007. p. 14
[30] Alvarez et al, 1998
[31] Hajer, 1995. p. 65. Hajer used the term 'discourse-coalitions' to denote such common discourse.
[32] Webb, 2010
[33] Scott, 1985

multi-layered forms of networking and alliance[34], they should be understood in terms of both these processes as specific to everyday life, as should the transformative power of these narratives. Protest narratives take on different meanings according to the purpose of particular groups and the actors who subscribe to them, providing the basis for what Hajer called a 'discourse coalition'[35]. This is a coalition that derives from 'not singular utopias or a unity founded upon identity positions'[36] but from a strategic drive of diverse groups to find a suitable meaning of the narratives of protests. As Tsing[37] argues, the network in this global era does not operate as smoothly as theorists of globalisation have assumed, one can understand the nature of contemporary social movement in terms of both the conflict of ideas and meaning, and coalition among the compatibles.

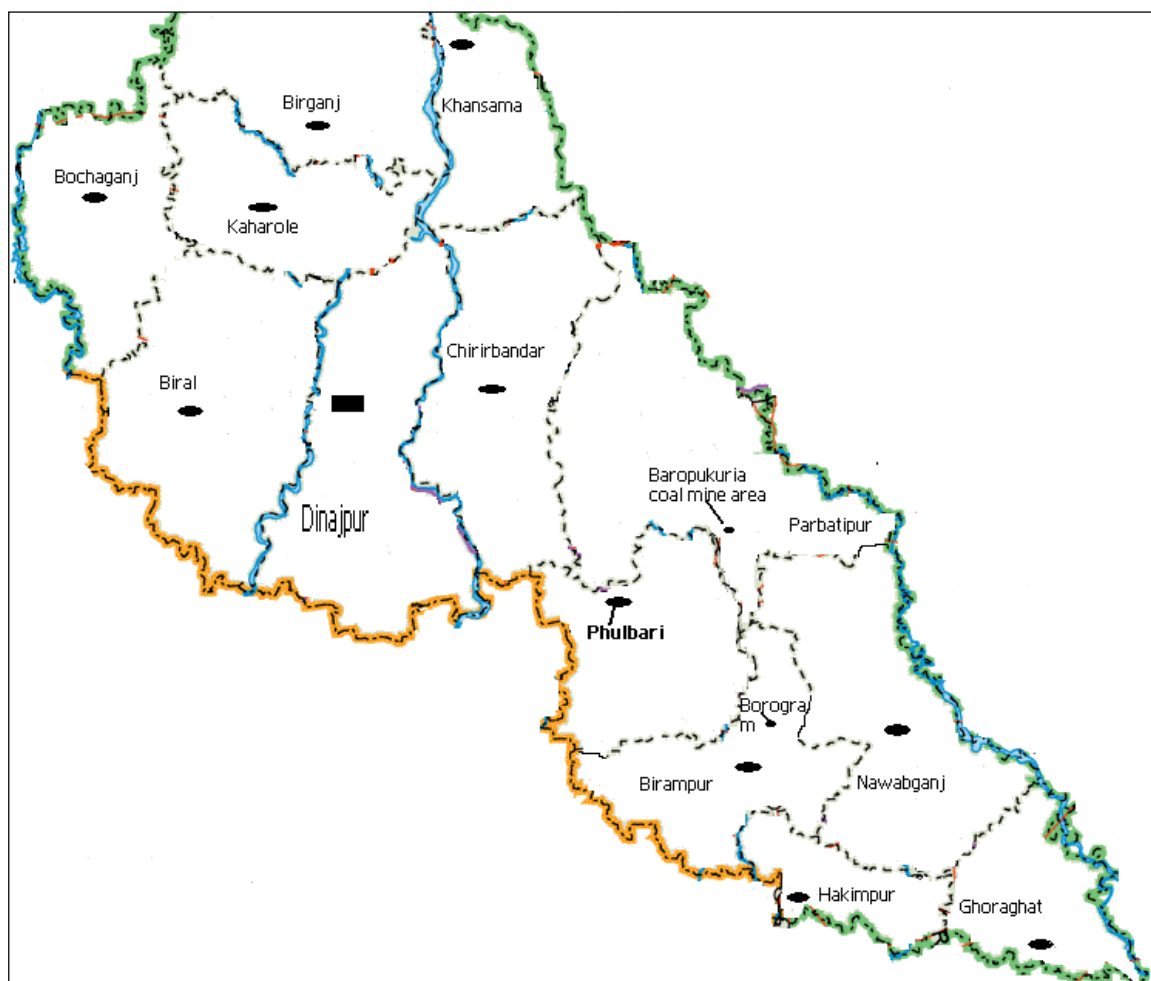[34] Edelman, 2001; Appadurai, 2000
[35] Hajer, 1995
[36] Maeckelbergh, 2009
[37] Tsing, 2005

Annex: 1. Map showing the location of Phulbari in Bangladesh

2. Map showing the location of Phulbari town, Borogram and Baropukuria Caol Mine in Dinajpur district

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