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Conflict and astroturfing in Niyamgiri: The importance of national advocacy networks in anti-corporate social movements

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Abstract

Traditional models of transnational advocacy networks (TANs) and stakeholder management do not capture the nuance and dynamics of (counter-)organising processes around anti-corporate mobilisation. Based on the case of a resistance movement against a planned bauxite mine on tribal land in India, we develop a process theory of interactions between local, national and international actors within transnational advocacy networks. These encounters are not always friendly and are often characterised by conflict between actors with disparate goals and interests. We highlight the importance of national advocacy networks (NANs) in anti-corporate social movements and describe the conflicts and disruptions that result from ignoring them. Our findings also point to the role of corporate counter-mobilisation strategies in shaping resistance movements. Our narrative revolves around a particular focal actor in the anti-mining campaign: a young tribal man who emerged as a passionate spokesperson of the movement, but later became a supporter of the controversial mine. Our findings contribute to a richer understanding of the processes underlying transnational and national anti-corporate mobilisation.

Keywords

transnational advocacy, national advocacy networks (NANs), anti-corporate social movement, astroturfing, boomerang model, process

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Introduction

'The time has come to fight; there is no time to waste. That is why we are stopping the bulldozers… Even if we die, we will not let Niyamgiri go. That is why we want you to join our struggle.' (Jika, Survival International video 2008)

'I realised that this mining project will not have a detrimental effect on our livelihood and culture in any way. It would rather usher in development in our area.' (Jika, national TV interview 2010)

The Niyamgiri mountain range in India is a chain of hills covered by dense old-growth forests, rich in biodiversity and largely untouched by modern infrastructure. For the 8000 members of the Dongria Kondh tribe that inhabit the region, the mountains are a source of livelihood and carry deep religious significance. The mountains also contain a rich deposit of bauxite and one mountain, Niyam Dongar, is the proposed site for a large bauxite mine that will supply an existing refinery located on the plains. Since 2002 the multinational company behind this project, Vedanta Resources, has faced considerable opposition from a continually evolving alliance of local communities, Indian activists and political organizations, as well as international activists and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) like ActionAid and Survival International. Many of the Dongria Kondh and their supporters claim that the open-pit mining project would destroy their local environment, contaminate the water supply of the entire area, severely impact their livelihood and culture, and desecrate Niyam Dongar, the mountain they consider the abode of their god.

The social movement against Vedanta is an example of a local movement that developed into a transnational advocacy network (TAN), where social movement actors from various countries and organisations engaged in a common 'battle' against a corporation (McAteer & Pulver, 2009; Zavestoski, 2009; Davis, Morill, Rao & Soule, 2008). In this paper, we narrate the story of Jika, a Dongria Kondh in his early twenties and one of the few English-speaking members of his community. During 2006, after a period of involvement with national activists, Jika emerged as the key spokesperson of the anti-mining movement and became the public face of the resistance against Vedanta. Over a three-year period, Jika appeared in numerous Indian and international articles, and

was featured on television and documentary films about the campaign to save the mountain from mining. At the time of writing, a Google search with his name yields more than 1000 results – an impressive return given the complete lack of internet access in Niyamgiri. Jika also played a crucial role as a grassroots organiser of community resistance and as a conduit for international and Indian activists wishing to gain access into the remote Dongria communities. However, on July 27, 2009, Jika 'changed sides', announcing his *support* for Vedanta's bauxite mine in a YouTube video. The opening quotes highlight his volte-face and what appears to be a sudden and unexpected transformation from strident opposition to mining to an avid supporter of the mine as a means to achieve local economic development.

How are we to theorise these events? What can they tell us about the dynamics within transnational movements and about the role of corporations in counter-mobilising? Despite the potential power of transnational advocacy networks to achieve social change, relationships between actors within the network are not always smooth (Bebbington et al., 2008; Jordan & van Tuijl, 2000; Rodrigues, 2011). Yet, the issue of heterogeneity, disruption and conflict within transnational advocacy networks remains under-researched. Astroturf organising, corporate efforts to form or support artificial grassroots groups that resemble the genuine grassroots opposition they face (Beder, 1998), further adds another layer of complexity to TANs that requires deeper empirical investigation. We address these two gaps through our analysis of the anti-Vedanta movement and the story of Jika in an attempt to unveil the mechanisms and interactions within and against the anti-corporate movement. Our longitudinal case study describes and analyses the events and interactions leading up to and following Jika's dramatic reversal as well as the changing structure of the advocacy network. Our paper makes two main contributions to organisational studies of transnational anti-corporate mobilisation.

First, we highlight the diversity of actors involved in anti-corporate resistance and argue that too little attention has been paid to *national* advocacy networks (NANs) and the heterogeneity of

local and national conditions under which domestic movements seek transnational support. Rather than framing anti-corporate movements as a static front opposing the corporation, we highlight actors' dynamic interactions and differences in interests, power, ideology and background, which we label *social movement organising*.

Second, we point to the active role of the corporation in countering the resistance movement. In the context of anti-corporate mobilisation, social movement organising is a process that is embedded within changing constellations and networks of organisations and actors whose activities (directly or indirectly) have a bearing on the activities of a corporation and evolve in interaction with corporate counter-mobilisation activities. Jika's defection represents only one of several other disruptions in the complex process of social movement organizing at different scales, but one in which the active role of the targeted corporation in disrupting and co-opting social movements should not be underestimated. We argue that current theories of stakeholder management do not capture this complexity. In developing a process theory of anti-corporate mobilisation and counter-mobilisation we hope to contribute to a fuller and more nuanced understanding of conflicts between market, state and transnational coalitions of civil society actors.

Our paper is organized as follows. First, we introduce the theoretical background of our study. Drawing on accounts of conflict in transnational movements and the critical role of NGOs in transnational networks, we point out that organisation studies has largely ignored the often disruptive nature of transnational anti-corporate organising efforts, and that there has been insufficient attention paid to NANs. We review the literature on heterogeneity and conflict in anti-corporate movements from other fields to add more nuance to their discussion in management and organisation studies. Second, we introduce our case study, method and our sources of data. We then present our findings in form of a rich narrative, followed by a discussion of the theoretical implications of our findings. Based on our findings we develop a process theory of the resistance movement that can also be applied to other anti-corporate movements. We conclude by identifying

directions for future research.

Transnational Advocacy Networks and Anti-Corporate Mobilisation

Transnational advocacy networks are international networks of actors who collaborate on a particular issue and use informational and symbolic resources to influence power holders – usually national governments and multinational corporations. Much of the literature on TANs has emerged from studies in international relations, political science and sociology where the focus is on states and international organisations as targets of mobilisation around particular global issues (Keck and Sikkink, 1998; Smith, 2004; Smith & Johnston, 2002; Tarrow, 2001).

TANs bring together local, national and international social movements and international NGOs (Tarrow, 2001). Domestic activists provide grassroots information about local struggles and their transnational supporters use their clout with international organisations and other governments targeting national governments and corporations to achieve domestic policy change and empower anti-corporate activism (Doh & Teegen, 2004; Kapelus, 2002; Keck & Sikkink, 1998). Ideas and tactics generated in movements, such as the peace, human rights, women's and environmental movements are said to spread from the Western world to countries in the so-called 'periphery' of the world system (Smith, 2004). This basic assumption leads to an emphasis on the role of international NGOs – most of them with their headquarters in the 'core countries' – that strategically use information to influence power holders and provide know-how, material resources to domestic activists and social movement organisations in the periphery, giving them the leverage they need to achieve policy gains through a 'boomerang pattern of influence' (Keck & Sikkink, 1998: 12).

Keck and Sikkink (1998) emphasise the importance of good collaboration between activists at different levels but do not go into detail of the workings of such transnational networks. This is a gap we hope to address with our study of the anti-mining campaign in Niyamgiri, which we think has applicability more generally. The social movement against Vedanta is not an isolated case.

Corporations from the extractive industry sector (oil and gas, mining as well as the extraction of renewable natural resources) often have significant social, environmental, and economic impacts at the local and national level which turns them into prime targets of anti-corporate mobilisation at the local, national and transnational level (Banerjee, 2008; Bebbington et al., 2008; Kapelus, 2002; Whiteman, 2009). Social movements, especially when amplified by transnational networks, can influence CSR practices (den Hond & de Bakker, 2007), the investment decisions of multinational corporations (Skippari & Pajunen, 2010), and provide support to weak stakeholders increasing their chances of holding multinational corporations to account (Doh & Teegen, 2004; Kapelus, 2002).

There are two major shortcomings in much of the management literature on anti-corporate movements. First, the focus is primarily on powerful and formally organised Western NGOs, who amplify the voices of weak domestic stakeholder groups in developing countries to reach out to Western supporters, who then in turn have the power to hold the corporation to account in a classic boomerang pattern. National level actors and the 'decentralised, non-hierarchical, grassroots-based social movements' (Boehm, Spicer, & Fleming, 2008: 170) that usually are at the forefront of anti-corporate mobilisation at the local level are generally ignored. Second, there is an assumption that coalitions between NGOs and local corporate stakeholders are stable. We argue that behind the visible protests and NGO campaigns against corporations that are the focus of most of the literature (de Bakker & den Hond, 2007; Doh & Teegen, 2004; Jordan & van Tuijl, 2000; Soule, 2009), lies an unstable conglomerate of actors with changing and often conflicted relationships over the life cycle of a campaign. To address these shortcomings we introduce the concept of national advocacy networks to account for national social movement structures, using the example of India.

Intersecting Networks: TANs and NANs

Transnational advocacy networks are often conceptualised using the well-known boomerang model, which assumes that transnationalisation occurs because of weak influence of domestic

activists and their lack of technical know-how and material resources (Keck & Sikkink, 1998; Smith, 2004). The argument is that local movements from countries in 'the periphery' seek transnational support because they face high levels of repression and lack the political resources to influence policy at the domestic level. As Smith (2004: 313) argues, 'the world-system hierarchy makes both elite and social movement actors on the periphery […] far less able to affect the global economic and political decisions that shape their environments' which is the reason why they need transnational support from the so-called 'core countries'.

While certainly true for many countries, we argue that the assumptions of the boomerang model and the core-periphery distinction do not capture the full diversity of conditions under which local social movements transnationalise and are not attuned to the specifics of anti-corporate mobilisation in countries such as India. The Indian national context is characterised by a strong civil society and decades of social mobilisation in a democratic system. India also has a long history of social movement organising (see Ray & Katzenstein. 2005) from the independence movement in the early 1900s to more recent farmers' rights struggles and anti-corporate movements (Banerjee, 2011a; 2011b). These include social movements against multinational agricultural giants Cargill and Monsanto (Herring, 2005; Kostova & Zaheer, 1999), protests against CocaCola in Kerala (Raman, 2010), to the current protests against mining and metal multinationals like Vedanta and the Pohang Steel Company from South Korea. National level networks and social movement organisations such as the National Alliance of People's Movements or the National Campaign against Big Dams are examples of the very active national advocacy networks that pose a 'serious challenge to the dominant ideology of meaning and patterns of development' in the country (Swain, 2010: 49).

These networks comprise a class of experienced domestic activists who are internationally networked, resourceful and media savvy (Katzenstein, Kothari & Mehta, 2001; Shah, 2004; Swain, 2010). Anti-Monsanto activist Vandana Shiva, anti-Narmada dam figurehead Medha Patkar and social activist Arundhati Roy are prominent, internationally known examples but there are many

more who have gained national prominence. Despite being classified as a developing country, India cannot be considered a 'peripheral' country, neither in terms of its economic development and growing importance on the world stage, nor with respect to the strength of its domestic activists and social movement organisations. The core/periphery distinction of the boomerang model therefore does not capture the full diversity of conditions under which local social movements transnationalise, and cannot account for the national context in which mobilisation occurs.

To address this domestic gap, we introduce the concept of the national advocacy network, or NAN (see Figure 1). NANs consist of national activists, NGOs, community organisations, research organisations and independent media groups that are engaged in national-level advocacy on behalf of the numerous local struggles in remote parts of the country. NANs, with their focus on domestic goals, operate alongside internationally oriented actors and, as we will show, this may result in collaboration but also in conflict and disruption. NANs can be conceived of as national 'social movement communities' (Staggenborg, 2002) at the often neglected meso-level of analysis in social movement studies (McAdam, 2003). Our assertion is that at the domestic level, NANs operate according to the same principles as TANs – empowering local grassroots activists through the provision of technical and strategic know-how and leveraging local information into broader campaigns to influence national power holders. We argue that rather than lacking influence at the national level as assumed in the boomerang model, in most cases NANs and the grassroots groups they support do have various pathways of influencing the state and corporations. Local resistance strategies (such as blocking access roads to prevent the construction of a mine) can be surprisingly effective in delaying progress of projects and national-level lobbying under democratic circumstances might result in political influence-taking on corporations. Nevertheless, NAN activists may decide that transnational networks might be valuable to disseminate information and gather broader support for their cause. However, this process of local-national-transnational activism has not yet been explored and we argue that the NAN concept enhances our understanding

of this process by extending the traditional boomerang model to include the national context as a factor that impacts the preconditions from which support is being sought and thus shapes the relationships within transnational networks.

Insert Figure 1 about here

A NAN perspective represents a meso-level focus that is well suited to uncover dynamics, relationships and processes *within* movements rather than the conditions of their emergence and outcomes (Gerhards & Rucht, 1992; McAdam, 2003; Staggenborg, 2002). Such a perspective can illuminate the mechanisms of TAN formation and the conflicts accompanying that process. Moreover, the structure of NANs can account for the role of individual actors and informal networks of activists in addition to formally organised NGOs that are the dominant focus of studies on anti-corporate movements. Individual actors can become important figures in social movements, even if they are not official 'movement leaders' of organised resistance movements (Juska & Edwards, 2005). Other authors have also highlighted the role of individual domestic activists in the process of framing and 'selling' local issues to outside supporters (Bob, 2005), recruiting new activists (McAdam, 2003), building transnational linkages (Sikkink, 2005) and coordinating organisations and networks in larger movements (Gerhards & Rucht, 1992). Thus, the NAN is conceived of as a set of engaged, more *and* less formally organised and networked national actors in a country's internal advocacy efforts.

NAN actors, in contrast to transnational advocacy organisations, are less interested in the creation of a global polity (Reitan, 2007) but focus their attention on targeting powerful stakeholders at the national level. While transnational activists may shift their focus to other struggles once a particular campaign is over, local and national activists often continue to operate in the region. The local and national focus of NANs may at times be at odds with the expectations,

strategies and behaviours of transnational actors. There is a growing awareness that transnational networks are not always as benign as they might appear and that more powerful Western activists and NGOs often have different interests in and understandings of local grievances (Bob, 2005; Holzscheiter, 2011; Jordan & van Tuijl, 2000; Smith, 2004).

Studies have shown that TANs often fail to fulfil the 'promises of empowerment' (Rodrigues, 2011: 3) and underrepresent the interests of domestic activists (Dingwerth, 2008). For example, in her comparative case study of two Latin American movements that received transnational support, Rodrigues (2011) found that the main reasons for the absence of local empowerment were the lack of long-term support by international NGOs and the inability of local groups to consolidate the gains provided by transnational support. Her work highlights the importance of national-level activists and organisations for guaranteeing some form of continuity in the movement and acting as mediators between international and local actors. Despite their adherence to a common cause there are tensions between national and transnational actors and transnational NGOs. Western NGOs often tend to promote their own agenda, which at times may conflict with local interests, (Jordan & van Tuijl, 2000; Rodrigues, 2011). As Jordan and van Tuijl (2000) argue, successful and equitable cases of cooperation and interaction in transnational campaigns are the exception rather than the rule.

A study on a transnational campaign against child labor in the Pakistan soccer ball industry by Khan et al. (2007) is one of the few critical accounts of transnational mobilisation in management studies and exposes the different interests and meanings of campaign success for TAN participants. Supporting earlier findings from the Bangladeshi garment industry (Brooks, 2005), Khan and colleagues showed that while at first sight successful in stopping the use of child labor, the transnational campaign ultimately condemned producer families to even deeper poverty. The authors describe how local villagers, deprived of their livelihoods after the 'successful' international campaign, attacked the vehicles of international NGO staff, but they do not explore in more detail

the events leading up to this situation, or which actors were involved, nor the tensions within advocacy networks (Khan et al., 2007). While not discounting the value that transnational support can bring to local struggles, we argue that there is a need for a more critical analysis of power relations between actors in transnational networks while recognising that international NGOs have the potential to abuse their power within TANs (Bob, 2005; Dingwerth, 2008; Holzscheiter, 2011; Mendelson & Glenn, 2002).

In our study, we track the emergence and development of what became a transnational anti-corporate movement, focusing on the interactions and disruptions taking place among focal actors ranging from national and international NGOs to domestic activists and individual local actors. We provide a detailed account of the relationships within a transnational network that is sensitive to heterogeneity and conflict, and takes into account the role of corporations as key actors influencing the elements and direction of the network. Our case study thus provides a richer and more complex picture of inter-, and intra-group dynamics, and shifting priorities and loyalties that result.

Method

This paper is part of a larger study of the resistance against Vedanta and other development projects in Orissa. Responding to calls for more qualitative and ethnographic research on the meso-level dynamics within social movements (McAdam, 2003), ethnographic fieldwork conducted by the first author from November 2008 to March 2009 and again from March to May 2010 was the main source of empirical material. The transformation of our main protagonist, Jika, from a resistance icon to supporter of the project occurred in the northern summer of 2009. His transformation from a tribal 'village kid' to a central figure in the anti-mining campaign emerged as a key theme during the process of 'progressive focusing' of the case study during the first field trip (Silverman, 2010). His being 'pulled at' by all major actors involved in the conflict, his 'defection' in 2009, and the way in which his story was repeatedly discussed by key informants make Jika's

experience an ‘extreme’ case (Eisenhardt, 1989) within the larger case study that offered an excellent opportunity to examine the dynamics within transnational networks and the role of corporations in counter-movement organising. We present our rich empirical material in form of a narrative (Chase, 2005; Langley, 1999; Whiteman & Cooper, 2011). All individual names were changed in the narrative to protect people’s identities but we specified the nationality of the individual to be able to distinguish between domestic and foreign activists. We did not change the names of the key organisations involved because their involvement in the resistance movement is publicly documented.

Data sources

Our narrative is built from six sources. (1) Three in-depth interviews with Jika, the central protagonist in our narrative. (2) Twenty-nine unstructured interviews with nine activists, five managers, seven NGO, and two government staff, who were involved in the Niyamgiri struggle at either the local, national or transnational level. Multiple interviews at different times were conducted with some of these respondents. (3) Participant observation and ethnographic interviews conducted during a field trip in the Niyamgiri mountains by the first author along with five Delhi-based activists in December 2008, guided by Jika and two members of his tribe. (4) Participant observation and ethnographic interviews by the first author who lived and travelled with different activists on various occasions, totalling a period of about 3 months during which intensive contact was maintained with local and national Indian activists. (5) Email exchanges and postings on a daily electronic mailing list (listserv), where up-to-date information on anti-displacement campaigns in Orissa and other states is distributed among activists. (6) Regional and national newspaper articles, press releases, legal documents, research reports and other documents related to the case published between 2002 and 2011.

All interviews, except four of the five interviews with Vedanta staff and the government

officials who did not give their permission, were recorded (in total over 45 hours) and transcribed verbatim. Detailed notes, that also contained short verbatim quotes, were taken during interviews when recording was not allowed, and written up in a detailed report directly after the interview. Extensive handwritten field notes were maintained during phases of participant observation, and later written up in detailed field reports covering events, interactions, discussions and first tentative theoretical connections made by the first author.

Validity checks

When gathering this type of retrospective information, hindsight bias and the potential for informants' inaccurate recall of information need to be taken into account (Fischhoff & Beyth, 1975). Respondents were permitted to skip certain events when they indicated they could not recall them properly, and subsequent cross checking of information with other participants and data sources was done to ensure accuracy of the description of particular events. Hindsight bias was addressed by comparing information gathered at different points in time. Multiple visits to the field and on-going contact maintained with key informants in between field trips allowed us to juxtapose explanations given after Jika's defection with statements and observations recorded during the time when he was still involved in the movement. Finally, the empirical material used to build the final narrative was triangulated using the diversity of data sources and available interviews.

Data analysis

All empirical material was compiled and analysed with two purposes in mind. First, the history and evolution of the anti-Vedanta movement was reconstructed and triangulated from the diversity of gathered information. Second, using theme analysis (Dutton & Dukerich, 1991; Plowman et al., 2007), we explained 'the pattern of interpretations and actions over time' (Dutton & Dukerich, 1991: 522) with respect to the interactions of movement actors at local, national, and

international levels, their conflicts and interpretations of events. The initial coding of all interview material by the first author resulted in 58 broad themes that emerged from respondents' discussion or activities. These themes were then jointly discussed by all authors and narrowed down to ten categories by grouping the larger number of themes. Examples of these categories are: 'disruption and conflict', 'Jika's emergence', 'national advocacy', 'negative grassroots impact of NGOs', 'mobilising people', 'goal conflicts in the movement', 'counter-movement', and 'interaction among movement actors'. The category 'negative grassroots impact of NGOs', for example, grouped all statements about activists' perceptions of how the NGO system had negative consequences for grassroots mobilisation. The category 'Jika's emergence' grouped all statements related to his emergence as a central movement figure and spokesperson. 'Counter-movement' comprised all themes to do with pro-corporate activities by the government, Vedanta, or local pro-corporate groups.

These categories and related themes were then used in a third step for a detailed analysis of all interviews. The detailed coding explicitly showed the depth and breadth with which each category and its themes were supported by the empirical material and allowed us to focus our analysis. The additional textual material, like newspaper articles, reports, legal documents, etc. was used to further augment our analysis, especially with respect to reconstructing the history of the movement. The narrative was then written up by the first author using our reconstruction of the history of the movement as well as the central categories and themes as a guideline. Some of the more central categories and related themes were used as headings and sub-headings. The narrative went through a number of iterations following discussions among all authors about their understanding of the dynamics within the movement and the interactions of key actors in it, as well as the degree to which different themes were supported by the empirical material.

Findings

Our findings distinguish four periods of relative continuity in terms of the activities and

actors involved: local resistance, NAN support and emerging international interest, rapid internationalisation, and conflict and re-localisation. Without assuming a predictable progression between the phases, examining the four periods enables us to capture the interactions between activities and emerging networks. Setting temporal brackets, we can examine 'how actions of one period lead to changes in the context that will affect action in subsequent periods' (Langley, 1999: 703). Specific events in the process of anti-corporate movement organising indicate the discontinuity of the system and represent 'turning points' in which structural changes occur that have an influence on further interactions (Hernes & Bakken, 2003). Based on our analysis of the anti-mining movement in Orissa we propose a process model of resistance movements as shown in Figure 2. While we do not wish to generalise our findings from a single case study to all social movements we believe there are certain patterns, contextual factors and underlying logics that can enable us to develop a process theory that is both interpretive (i.e. has multiple stories and actors) and critical (i.e. giving voice to local actors whose role may be marginalised due to the influence of more powerful transnational actors) (Langley, 2008).

Insert Figure 2 about here

Local resistance (2002–2003)

The resistance against Vedanta emerged in 2002, when Vedanta Aluminium Limited started to acquire land for an aluminium refinery project at the foothills of Niyamgiri on land inhabited by Kutia Kondh tribal people and other subsistence farmers. The refinery was to be supplied with bauxite from a mine in the Niyamgiri mountains located on the lands of another tribal group, the Dongria Kondh. The affected villagers quickly mobilised at the village level and later formed a resistance organisation that was supported by citizens of a nearby town. Resistance was mainly spontaneous but often involved hundreds of people, although organised mass protests were rare

during this time, since resistance networks were still being formed. ActionAid, a high profile international NGO, had been working with the rural communities for some years on development issues and a local ActionAid staff member played a major role in the formation of the initial resistance movement. The agitation against Vedanta emerged at a time when ActionAid's mission as an organisation shifted from providing development aid to a promoting a rights-based advocacy approach. The grassroots campaign against Vedanta represented an immediate opportunity to demonstrate this strategic shift. The movement against Vedanta at that time therefore consisted of a largely localised and unstable alliance of actors with different interests, a lack of systematic communication, strategic planning and leadership, and no transnational activities.

Early protests targeted the refinery construction in the plains and little attention was paid to the proposed mining venture in the mountains. Since ActionAid and the urban resistance organisation lacked contact with the remote Dongria Kondh communities, the initial mobilisation did not involve them. Over time information about the mine reached the Dongria villages in the mountains, first through the efforts of a local NGO that worked with the Dongria on improving sanitation and farming methods, and later through NAN activists. When in early 2003 some Dongria leaders wanted to protest at a public hearing about the project, they were forced out of the meeting by Vedanta security staff and police (Amnesty International, 2010). As shown in the process map, the Orissa government strongly supported Vedanta's mining and refinery project from the beginning.

NAN support and emerging international interest (end 2003–early 2006)

During this period, organised rallies and protest demonstrations, often with thousands of participants replaced the largely uncoordinated resistance against land acquisition for the refinery. Governmental land acquisition teams and Vedanta security personnel allegedly repeatedly intimidated protestors and tried to repress local resistance. This period also saw the emergence of

pro-Vedanta groups of small business owners and potential contractors from nearby areas along with others hoping to benefit from industrialisation in the region. Connected to this, groups of so-called 'goons' started a campaign of fear and intimidation in the refinery area and villagers were warned not to participate in any anti-corporate protests. According to activist reports by Indian activists, local community members and international NGOs, resistance leaders and their families were frequently arrested, threatened and beaten. In 2005, one anti-Vedanta activist was killed in a car accident under suspicious circumstances that locals felt were never properly investigated by the police. Members of a youth club, ironically funded by Vedanta as part of their CSR activities, assaulted anti-Vedanta protestors with company-sponsored cricket bats. The company also mobilised local development NGOs to promote their CSR initiatives that promised economic benefits to local villagers provided they stopped opposing the refinery project. Several reports documented the apparent collusion between the state government and Vedanta in the systematic repression of the anti-Vedanta movement (ActionAid, 2007; Amnesty International, 2010; Council on Ethics, 2007).

This repression also affected NAN activists who started to become involved in the Vedanta case from 2003 onwards. These activists came from diverse backgrounds and included young university graduates working as researchers for Indian NGOs, activist film-makers interested in spreading the word about people struggles all over India, lawyers providing pro-bono support to grassroots struggles, seasoned community organisers as well as full-time activists who once worked for national or international NGOs but had left their organisations because they were dissatisfied with the NGO movement and wanted to operate as individual activists and researchers. NAN activists started attending local protest events, mobilising villagers and making connections between grassroots activists and other anti-industrialisation struggles across Orissa. Citing their experiences with earlier struggles, many of these NAN activists argued that the case of Vedanta's refinery and planned mine was only one example of the reckless industrialisation policies of the Indian

government:

> As you can see in the tribal populated areas of India that o*nly* mineral based industries and industrialisation on the base of mineral industries [...] it is something like a looting of resources […] *just* exporting the raw products [...] is not at all employment generating. It is *not* in the interest of middle class even. And the tribal people they will be displaced and will become destitute. *This* development model *has* to be stopped. […] Our ultimate goal is to *stop* this process, have an alternative development model [...] in which the tribal people, the village farmers who are dependent on agriculture and forest resources... the model should keep *their* survival in the center.
>
> (State-level activist, March 2010)

Due to the systematic lack of information and exclusion from any public hearings conducted by Vedanta and the local authorities (Amnesty International, 2010), many Dongria Kondh until quite late were not aware of the mining plans, the connection between the refinery and a later mine , as well as the potential impacts of a mine on their lives. Even the alliance with ActionAid had until then focused its efforts on the refinery and did not seek to collaborate with the Dongria Kondh on the mining issue at the time because they did not have access to the remote hill communities. Moreover, the Dongria traditionally had little connection with the people in the plains. Resistance among the Dongria grew rapidly as soon as they faced the first impacts of Vedanta's mining plans in the form of the building of roads and other construction activity on their ancestral lands. Through the mediation of NAN activists, Dongria Kondh leaders officially joined the anti-Vedanta organisation in the plains. Starting in 2004, NAN activists had not only locally mobilised people but also filed a number of petitions with the government that ultimately reached the Indian Supreme Court. Public awareness of the Niyamgiri case increased within India and several government and civil society research teams visited the remote Niyamgiri mountains to conduct social and environmental impact assessments and fact finding missions on allegations about Vedanta's activities, such as illegal test blasts and construction of roads and facilities (Amnesty International, 2010; Padel & Das, 2010).

Through their informal networks, these early NAN actors disseminated information about the anti-refinery struggle to the wider NAN network until it reached a group of activists in Delhi

who had formed the 'Delhi Solidarity Group' to support anti-mining and other struggles. By 2006, a number of Delhi-based activists became involved in the case. These activists worked independently and were not affiliated to any specific organisation; however, they were connected to a wide network of other activists, support groups, and national as well as international NGOs, and became the backbone of the Indian national advocacy network (NAN) supporting local Niyamgiri communities in their struggle for land rights. Together with state-level and local activists, the Delhi-based activists visited the mountains to collect information and make local connections that would enable them to successfully channel grassroots information to the national level where they started to lobby the central government and organise protest events in the national capital.

Our process map depicts how the initial local and grassroots resistance of the Dongria slowly evolved into national activities by NAN activists that provided a broader platform to local voices within the country. Largely disconnected from this movement were ActionAid's activities against the refinery that were entirely dependent on the local network of their local staff, who did not collaborate much with NAN activists. An ActionAid publication from that time illustrates the separation between these two parts of the anti-Vedanta movement: one focused on the refinery was a small local network, while the other was a national-based campaign against the entire mining project and unbridled industrialisation in the region. A call to action at the end of the publication mentions only three 'campaigning groups' apart from ActionAid: the urban citizens' forum from the nearby town, the local resistance organisation of refinery affected communities that had been founded with support of ActionAid, and a third organisation for protection of the rights of India's tribal people. The publication does not make any mention of the efforts of state and national-level activists against Vedanta and the emerging resistance movement by the Dongria in the hills. In early 2006 the first international anti-mining activists from the UK travelled to Niyamgiri and began to publicise the Niyamgiri struggle in the UK, marking the beginning of another phase of resistance against Vedanta.

Rapid internationalisation (2006–2008)

According to local and national activists, two main factors led to the establishment of the refinery in 2007: repression by Vedanta, police and local pro-Vedanta groups, and the lack of coordinated leadership in the resistance movement at the grassroots level. NAN activists accused ActionAid of fragmenting the resistance movement by making grassroots activists dependent on their financial support and not making connections with other national resistance activities. During this time, Jika, the young Dongria Kondh man, rose to central importance in the anti-mining movement at Niyamgiri. Jika grew up in a village close to the plains and a nearby city that had more contact with the outside world than other more remote Dongria hamlets. From a young age, he was familiar with the activities of locally operating NGOs and at the age of 17, he decided to live with a Christian missionary who had opened a school. Learning English from the Bible, Jika soon became the only member of his tribe at that time fluent in three languages: Kui, the local tribal language, Oriya the state language, and English. He began supporting local NGOs in their work and started interacting with several Dongria villages in the mountains. Until 2006, however, Jika had not been part of the emerging resistance movement. His role in the movement began to change significantly once international activists recognised his multilingual ability. Ian, a UK photographer and activist, 'discovered' Jika and hired him as his guide and recommended him to other visitors:

> I said to him 'Look, you know, you can, you can make some money being an interpreter and a guide to these people [activists, NGOs] so you can get some sort of income and you help educate your people about what is taking place'.
>
> (Ian, December 2009)

Another UK activist, Charles who was well connected with the NAN, and Sunil, a film-maker and anti-mining NAN activist from Orissa's capital, also met Jika when travelling to the mountains to document the emerging grassroots movement. Though impressed by his ability to speak English, they initially did not see him as a person who could be a leader of the emerging resistance in Niyamgiri. Looking back, Sunil claims that Jika was 'not very interested' in the

resistance because he seemed happy wandering around the mountains talking to his fellow tribals about God and the things that he had learned from the local NGOs. As Ian put it, Jika was 'just a village kid who went around the hills singing songs about Jesus'.

However, Jika's multilingual ability was an asset for Ian, Sunil and Charles, all of whom hired him as a guide during their trips through the villages and eventually each of them developed a friendship with the young man. Charles invited Jika to his house to talk about his tribe and the threat of mining and encouraging Jika's musical interests, began to teach him to play the violin. He also gave Jika a book to read, which Jika later claimed had as much influence on him as the Bible did previously and eventually led him to leave his 'home' at the missionary's house. The book, 'Earthworm and Company Man', written by an Indian activist, describes the exploitation of tribal populations in India by the onslaught of industrialisation into their lands and their subsequent loss of livelihood. Jika later described his reactions to the book:

> That time, I didn't know what is Niyamgiri [laughs]. […] When I read this book about the tribe, I realised what they are and that I am a member of the Dongria Kondh. I then knew that this was something to protect.
>
> (Jika, December 2008)

> I was reading this book and … it is really we have to fight for my people, for my land.
>
> (Jika, March 2010)

Jika also stayed with Sunil, who later recalled spending long nights with Jika talking about the mountain and its god, Niyam Raja, and making plans about the future of the Dongria Kondh. Ian even claimed that he 'talked him [Jika] out of' his belief in Christianity. Ian also played a role in publicising the Niyamgiri case in the UK media by bringing a number of UK news agencies to Niyamgiri, all of who used Jika as a guide, quoting him as a spokesperson and resistance leader. Increasingly, state-level activists encouraged Jika to speak at resistance meetings that they organised together with the Dongria communities. As Jika explained:

> Nobody came and warned us about this [the mining]; we had to learn about it by ourselves. Now that I have learned I am telling everyone. Just today I visited three villages. When I arrive I call all the villagers and explain to them what is happening. I

> tell them how we will fight and that we have to remain strong at this moment. I have talked to different activists, and sometimes they come with me to help our people to understand what's happening.

Ashok, a seasoned activist from Orissa, claimed that it was he who taught Jika how to 'organise people'. Charles also took Jika to Delhi for a protest meeting where he introduced him to other activists, notably Medha and Sanjay originally from Orissa, who were well-connected with the Delhi and Orissa activist movements and had earlier worked for international NGOs in the capital before turning to activism. They also used Jika as a guide on their trips to Niyamgiri and encouraged him to travel from village to village to educate his people about their forest rights and the potential impacts of a mine on Niyamgiri.

Within a few months, through his regular interaction with activists, local, national and international NGOs, Jika evolved from being a tour guide and local informant to become the public face of the anti-Vedanta resistance, and a key actor in the mobilisation of the Dongria Kondh. He appeared in a number of national and international newspapers, was cited on many NGO websites, and featured in two documentaries and several video clips reporting the struggle:

> And all of a sudden he was embraced by *everyone*, he was kind of the darling of [the] Niyamgiri, you know. This sort of young, you know energetic, tribal kid who powerfully worked to help his people. And I got him on BBC, I mean, I sent so many people there to him and so many magazines, stations and newspapers and stuff.
>
> (Ian, photographer/activist, UK)

Over a two-year period (2007–2008), Jika visited over 100 Dongria villages mobilising support against Vedanta's plan to mine Niyam Dongar. He played tour guide to a host of national and international activists, resistance members, photographers, film-makers and researchers (including the first author). Supported by activists from the NAN, he became a skilful public speaker and community organiser occupying a central position in the national campaign against Vedanta. Jika became the main conduit and native informant for anyone wanting access to the Dongria Kondh villages. He even met high-ranking national and international politicians on trips to Delhi, organised by NAN activists. After the Norwegian Government's decision to disinvest from

its shareholdings in Vedanta due to ethical concerns (Council on Ethics, 2007), Jika personally thanked the Norwegian Ambassador for his country's support. The Norwegian Ethics Council had received considerable input and support by NAN activists and organisations that had conducted several studies on Niyamgiri and disseminated their information and provided local contacts. As a result of the Council's report and the subsequent disinvestment decision, the international campaign against Vedanta grew in strength and a number of international NGOs took up the issue and began to lobby other institutional shareholders.

During this period ActionAid began taking more interest in the Dongria and the mining project and had begun an international campaign against Vedanta by staging a protest at the company's Annual General Meeting in London in the summer of 2006. Internationalisation of the movement was not without its problems: Indian NAN activists were critical about how a local ActionAid staff member publicised the case in the UK media by claiming she represented the affected tribal people. Charles and Ian both used their connections in the UK to convince Survival International to take up the Dongria's case. Survival International was followed by Amnesty International, numerous smaller international NGOs working on mining or indigenous peoples' issues as well as a few anti-Vedanta groups. What began as a small, local and disorganised struggle was by this time truly an international movement that took up the cause of tribal forest dwellers against the might of a multinational corporation and the Indian state.

Conflict and re-localisation (2006–2008)

We will describe the activities and events during this period in three stages: conflicts within the anti-Vedanta movement, tensions caused by pro-corporate mobilisation, and the re-localisation of the movement as an outcome of these conflicts and tensions.

Conflicts within the movement

As discussed earlier, during the internationalisation period NAN activists already held

ActionAid at least partly responsible for losing the struggle against the construction of the refinery. They accused the NGO for its 'damaging' influence and tendency to directly 'intervene in the field' instead of just amplifying local voices from the grassroots and taking them to the international level [Medha, February 2009] as expected by NAN activists. Based on this and other experiences, many Indian NAN activists at state and national levels shared a general suspicion towards the negative local effects of the activities of international NGOs in general and wanted to restrict their role in social movements:

> As far as our experience is concerned, the role of NGOs is *very* controversial. We feel that *if* a certain NGO, which is understanding its limitation just [...] restricts itself giving some information support or logistic support, then this is OK. But if *any* NGO, national or international, locally they start playing the role of *leading* the movement, giving direction to the movement, *they are* to be suspected.
>
> (state-level activist, March 2003)

According to Delhi-based NAN activists, ActionAid created a 'parallel leadership' within the anti-mining resistance and misrepresented tribal culture to the outside world through the staged mass worship event that it had started conducting in Niyamgiri since March 2008. While ActionAid staff claimed staging the event was a way to 'showcase Dongria culture', NAN activists maintained that mass worships were not consistent with actual Dongria Kondh customs. Even ActionAid's attempts at giving an international platform to local voices was met with criticism. Starting in 2008 ActionAid flew local spokespersons to the UK every year to voice their complaints to Vedanta's Board of Directors at the company's Annual General Meeting (AGM). While such tactics generated international attention and definitely played a role in further disinvestments from Vedanta (see Figure 2), they did little to strengthen local activism and in fact, caused deeper divisions within the overall resistance movement. ActionAid was criticised for speaking on behalf of the affected tribal people and for misrepresenting the movement by portraying members of other tribal groups that were not part of the resistance as spokespersons of the movement. The following incident at the 2009 AGM of Vedanta illustrates the dysfunctional relationship between NAN activists and the international NGOs.

Sagar, an Indian activist living in the UK had come to protest at the AGM with hand-written banners and a megaphone. Along with other protestors, mainly mobilised by Survival and ActionAid, who were dressed in NGO shirts and carried professional colourful banners, he started to shout anti-Vedanta slogans in Oriya instead of English, claiming to carry 'the voice from the ground' to London. He was visibly annoyed and protested loudly when he was asked to stop his vocal protests by a couple of UK NGO staff because he was being 'too loud' and was disrupting an interview with Bianca Jagger that was being conducted nearby.

Another NAN activist claimed that ActionAid was not collaborating with actors other than the ones it supported financially (and who were thus dependent on ActionAid) and that it had collaborated with a local politician who had later betrayed the movement and coined the slogan 'Don't take Niyamgiri, take another mountain'. For NAN activists, the issue was much broader than a mine on Niyamgiri since a mine elsewhere would simply shift the problem and not address broader issues of land rights, tribal development, corporate and governmental accountability. ActionAid was accused of pushing its own rights-based agenda and ignoring the larger struggles of development and resource access. Apparently, a number of local and national level activists and resistance groups had become so frustrated with ActionAid's involvement in different grassroots movements all over India that at one point there had been discussions about drafting an official complaint letter to its headquarters in Delhi.

Hence, when Survival International, a UK NGO working for the protection of indigenous rights all over the world sent a staff member to India for a three-week research trip to Niyamgiri, one Delhi activist saw it necessary to warn the Survival staff not to 'repeat the same mistakes as ActionAid' (Medha, November 2008). Again, Jika served as the paid guide and interpreter during Survival's visit. For a second trip to Niyamgiri, Survival sent a film team to produce a documentary about the resistance movement causing more rifts and tensions within the movement. Despite his lack of access to electricity and the internet in his mountain home, the team gifted Jika a laptop to

'stay in touch' with Survival. This raised discontent among Indian activists in Delhi and Orissa who, at the same time had arranged a desktop computer for Jika at the office of a local NGO near his home village. Moreover, during the second visit Survival staff had less time to meet with NAN activists, leading to accusations that the international NGO was ignoring local knowledge and ideas about the campaign. Aware of the discontent she had caused among local activists, a Survival staff member later commented:

> It was a much faster, frantic trip with no time to visit everybody and I think a few people's noses got put down as a result. And I think it was also, because it wasn't one person travelling on her own asking lots of questions but it was three people with a lot of, you know, high-tech equipment with a clear plan. I don't know, I think we gave the impression more that it was … ehm … that our objective was a selfish one.
>
> (Survival International staff member, October 2009)

Well aware of the different decision making styles and organisational processes within the NAN and her own organisation, she added that she not always had 'an awful lot of time to convince people that you're not there to screw them over'. Essentially, Survival had started to make its own decisions about what direction the movement should take without consulting with NAN activists.

The following episode vividly illustrates the turf war within the anti-mining movement. At the end of 2008, a group of activists from Delhi (along with the first author) conducted a field trip to Niyamgiri. Jika had agreed to guide a group of five through the mountains. While the NAN activists were waiting for him at Charles' house close to Niyamgiri, Jika called to inform them that he was already occupied in guiding a Korean film team that had been sent by Survival International and that had offered to pay him for his services. When Medha informed the group about Jika's unavailability, a heated debate erupted about the 'interference' of international NGOs in grassroots resistance:

> How come Survival just gives out his phone number? We have to get him a new number as soon as possible. […] They [foreign NGOs] are destroying the movement by putting him in such an elevated position and it creates conflict in the village. […] This is another extractive industry happening.
>
> (Activist, December 2008, reconstructed from field notes)

Only after several phone calls and considerable pressure from the Delhi activists, Jika

decided to abandon the Koreans and join the NAN activists from Delhi as a guide. However, the Korean film crew was determined to get their footage and ventured out alone in their hired jeep, looking for their elusive guide. In the evening of the same day, the Koreans encountered the NAN activists at Jika's home village. An acrimonious confrontation between Indian activists and the Koreans ensued, with Jika caught in the middle. Despite Jika's popularity with international activists and the media, NAN activists took great pains to explain to the Koreans that Jika was just one person within a larger collective of grassroots actors and that Survival had no right sending the film crew to Niyamgiri without giving Jika the chance to consult his people.

This conflict also came at a time when a Marxist political resistance organisation had started to become involved in Niyamgiri. The organisation supported broader struggles for land and economic rights among disadvantaged sections of the Indian population and was considered by NAN activists to be a more legitimate and effective local actor than international NGOs. They therefore sought good relationships with the Marxist leaders and were not willing to jeopardise their own position by not adhering to the ban on international press and NGOs in Niyamgiri that had been announced by the Marxist organisation.

Jika, encouraged by NAN activists had joined the Marxist organisation together with a couple of other Dongria youths that the NAN activists hoped would emerge as local leaders. As a proof of his willingness to 'do or die' for their cause, Jika had three hammer and sickle symbols tattooed on his body. His new organisational membership however, was in conflict with his role as an international guide as the encounter with the Koreans showed. That night, Jika was visibly upset about the confrontation between NAN activists and the Koreans and admitted reluctantly that the Marxist organisation had warned him that they would withdraw their support if he was being 'corrupted by the money of foreigners'.

After a long discussion, mainly led by NAN activists and only weakly supported by Jika, the Koreans decided to leave Niyamgiri. This episode strongly influenced activists' attitudes to and

support for Survival's engagement and seemed to reinforce similar negative experiences with international NGOs. NAN activists criticised the lack of sensitivity expressed by Survival and the lack of consultation and alignment of strategies. Jika, however, later expressed how he had felt sorry for the Koreans that night:

> My heart was very sad that time. They have come to meet some purpose […] [laughs] How can you oppose, no? They have come spending lots of money to meet my people.
>
> (Jika, March 2010)

Why were NAN activists so motivated to present Jika as 'one among many' and a 'member of the collective' to the Korean film team? Our process model shows that Jika's role as a spokesperson and community mobiliser and the 'darling of Niyamgiri', as Ian had put it, did not remain unchallenged. The more he rose to fame, travelled to Delhi and other places, the more local people doubted his trustworthiness and accused him of taking money and gifts from outsiders. His attempts at 'dressing up' as a Dongria Kondh, growing his hair long and wearing more traditional clothes and jewellery for photos and resistance meetings were criticised by other Dongria Kondh and he began to face accusations and distrust in every community that he visited. Through their experiences with other movements, NAN activists were well aware of the risks of co-optation when a movement has just one prominent leader, especially a young and inexperienced one as Jika. Therefore, they strongly encouraged Jika to create strong bonds with the grassroots political organisations they deemed supportive of tribal peoples' interests (as opposed to more mainstream political parties) and to let other spokespersons and leaders emerge to support him. NAN activists were also conscious of their own role in making Jika the public face of the resistance and even before his actual defection they were aware of the tensions and pressures that Jika experienced as a result of his role. Jika also regretted the disruptions that the movement had caused in his daily life. He regularly complained that his life had been entirely taken over by the campaign and he was being 'pulled at' by too many parties, including his father who wanted him to study or get a job:

> And everybody came to me, political party, NGO people 'Jika, Jika' they took me this

> side, that side, that side. I went this side, that side… I don't have time, nothing I can do.
>
> (Jika, December 2008)

> Sometimes I was *utterly* tired that time, means I had no *peace* that time. […] You know there is this big foreign company and only Jika is fighting. It's OK if there are 10 or 7 Jikas, it's OK, it would be easy for them. But if Jika will go to every village, Jika will do everything, what can one Jika do?
>
> (Jika, March 2010)

> *Every* time [my father] will scold … 'Don't come to my house! *Study* or you don't come to my house!' My mom also, my village people also. I was *very* angry. I don't want to stay in family but I will fight for my people. Like I was mentally … broken. So I couldn't study because of these guys [activists], I [also] couldn't go to my *family*.
>
> (Jika, March 2010)

Reacting to such complaints, some NAN activists urged Jika to deal with these tensions, arguing that 'times are tough and Jika also needs to be tough' and demanded that he fulfilled his role as a community mobiliser:

> He was built up as a leader of the resistance over years. Everybody cares for him, is giving him presents and attention and now, when it is time for him to do something, he just shies away from any kind of responsibility, he shies away from doing the hard work, he just wants the glamour, like taking white people around Niyamgiri and seeing his name in the newspaper. But when it comes to telling people about the Forest Rights Act, he doesn't do it. Medha gave him a booklet about the Act a year ago and he still didn't read it. This is what is important and what he should be doing instead of playing around with his laptop.
>
> (Sunil, reconstructed from field notes, February 2009)

These quotes indicate the tensions and contradictions that Jika faced at the end of this period. Torn between his loyalties to local activists, NANs, foreign NGOS and his own community Jika became the perfect target of corporate counter-mobilising strategies, as we will see in the next section.

Counter-mobilisation

Repression by state police, corporate security forces and local pro-Vedanta supporters strengthened during the anti-refinery protests in the form of physical assaults and intimidation of protestors at meetings and public hearings, specific targeting of NAN activists before resistance meetings, delaying activists at train stations and following their vehicles, all of which contributed to the demise of the anti-refinery movement. When resistance against the proposed mine emerged in

Niyamgiri, both the corporation and state responded with counter-mobilisation efforts in an attempt to quell opposition to the mine. Jika recounted that Vedanta supporters were present at many resistance meetings and they made him understand that he was being watched. Two black jeeps driven by pro-Vedanta 'goons' regularly traversed the mountains and some Vedanta supporters even occupied a hut in a Dongria Kondh village to demonstrate their continued presence and intimidate villagers. Dongria Kondh women were threatened and at one point were too afraid to walk to the weekly market. Pro-corporate 'thugs' appeared in villages and at resistance meetings, intimidating attendees and those who spoke out against the mine. The heavy-handed tactics and violence by various pro-corporate actors are well documented by international NGOs, building on information gathered with the support of local and NAN activists (ActionAid, 2007; Amnesty International, 2010; Council of Ethics, 2007).

Some NAN activists were afraid that Jika, due to his high public profile, was in danger of being falsely charged, arrested, or even killed like the anti-refinery leader who was killed in a mysterious car 'accident' in 2005 and whose death was never properly investigated by the Orissa police. In 2009 some Dongria men attacked a Vedanta exploration team that had illegally entered their forest, resulting in severe injuries for one team member and a burnt jeep. Afterwards, Sunil feared that the incident could have severe consequences for local resistance leaders like Jika:

> People will be arrested, framed on false charges, people like Jika, Mukti, Anil, etc. will be the first to be targeted. And if that does happen, a bigger casualty than Kalinga Nagar [another struggle area in India where 12 tribal people had been shot by the police in 2006] cannot be ruled out. If it doesn't happen while the elections are on then it will definitely happen when they are over.
>
> (message to an online group)

Jika was also well aware of the possibility of his arrest and in 2008 during our trip to the mountains had joked when we passed a newly constructed jail that he would end up there. He had also heard of rumours about a bounty on his head allegedly set by local construction company contractors eager for the mining project to proceed. It is hard to ascertain whether Vedanta actively participated or merely tolerated repression of the anti-mining movement by pro-corporate groups.

Reports about vehicles of pro-corporate thugs entering and leaving the refinery and well known pro-corporate local businessmen being seen together with refinery managers support such assumptions. What is relatively clear however, are Vedanta's attempts at influencing the Orissa government to curb the activities of activists. In a press release in 2009, Vedanta urged the Orissa government to limit the activities of 'foreign' NGOs and activists in Niyamgiri because they were 'provoking innocent tribals to defame the government and the company' and were 'forcedly interacting' with local people. Extensive press coverage of alleged corruption of government officials by the company supports the view that Vedanta was hardly an innocent victim of the anti-mining resistance movement. Finally, Jika reported that from 2008 on Vedanta personnel and local company supporters regularly contacted him with offers of money and assistance in an attempt to buy him out of the resistance movement.

In its counter-mobilisation activities, Vedanta imitated a number of strategies employed by activists. Where NAN activists tried to connect grassroots struggles across Orissa by taking Jika to other locations of anti-mining struggle and organised delegations of activists to visit Niyamgiri, Vedanta organised a visit of several Dongria Kondh to another bauxite mine to 'learn about the benefits' that would accrue from mining in the region. Communication strategies of NAN activists in the form of videos featuring local testimonies and documentaries describing negative social and environmental impacts of the mine were countered with pro-industrialisation and pro-mining videos produced by the company and its supporters. Jika's exit video followed a similar pattern, showing his conversion from an anti-mining leader to a promoter of minerals-based industrialisation.

As described above, Jika's grassroots legitimacy was never as stable as NAN activists might have wished. That, together with his personal desire to study and pursue a career made him receptive to Vedanta's offers of a better life. Rumours, that Jika and other activists claimed were spread by pro-mining groups, were prevalent about Jika accepting money from Vedanta and other pro-corporate sources. During this period Jika was contacted repeatedly by refinery managers and

local businessmen resulting in his defection from the anti-Vedanta movement in the summer of 2009. Jika explained his position in a later interview:

> When the company people they met me they asked 'Oh Jika can you take some money? What do you want?' They were thinking Jika is a married person and with money he will be silent. I told 'Sir, I don't want anything, If you want to help me, my *aim* is education. I'll *study* and study and work for my people'. They were very happy. 'OK no problem we can help you for your education. No problem', they told like that.
>
> (Jika, March 2010)

From early 2009 onwards, Jika gradually reduced his involvement with the resistance to the point that activists found it difficult to reach him by phone. Rumours about him having 'changed sides' intensified among activists. His official exit video that appeared online in July 2009 confirmed the rumours. In the exit video, Jika explained his decision with the same passion he had earlier displayed when mobilising Dongria communities against the mine. He supported the anti-NGO rhetoric that had been another counter-mobilisation tactic employed by the pro-mining movement:

> And we were misguided by the NGOs […] different NGOs from other countries are coming to our Dongria Kondh area. […] Actually, they are not working for our tribe peoples' interest, they are working for their own interest. They never want development for my people. They want that Dongria people should be like that, they should be in the forest, they should be naked, there should be no development in that area. So they never wanted development for my people. So, all our people oppose them. Nobody will help them for those things. So, if they will come next time we just will send [them] out from our boundary, we will not allow them to enter into our area.
>
> (Jika, video, July 2009)

Jika further claimed in the video to have finally realised that Vedanta's CSR initiatives were the only way to lift his tribe out of poverty and that his engagement with the company enabled him to work for the betterment of his people in a more effective way than being part of the anti-mining movement:

> Because our people are in darkness, they don't know what is light, so we have to show them light, because they also need development. They need development like other people that live in the plain area and they don't want to oppose the mining. They will support the mining and we request to Anil Agarwal chairman of Vedanta, please, he has to start mining on the top and he has to develop our Dongria Kondh people. Otherwise no NGOs, no

> political party can develop my people. [...] This is the time. Vedanta has come which can really [bring] development, which can do really development for our people, we hope. And we'll join with this company and we'll help [the] company. […] But my aim … I will study. I have time I'll study, I'll do a job, and I'll work for my people not only against the company. […] I will stay neutral. … Actually, I'm not this side and not this side. Means, middle, means if I'm thinking my *aim* is education. First, I will do my education [in] three years [then] I will see what can I do.
>
> (Jika, March 2010)

So for a CSR investment of about Rs 7000 (about 117 Euro) annually for three years plus provision of room and board at a management school in Orissa's capital, Vedanta had transformed Jika from a community mobiliser and anti-mining activist into a fervent supporter of the mine. It also become harder for activists to contact Jika to try and convince him to re-think his decision as the company had given him a new phone and he had discarded the phone he was given by the NAN activists. Although Jika regretted losing many good friends among the NAN activists, he tried to downplay his defection in March 2010 arguing that politicians changed sides all the time and that he was not the only young man being 'sponsored' by Vedanta.

Re-localisation

At the end of 2008, when the episode with the Korean film team occurred, power relations within the resistance movement had begun to shift. During 2009–2010, the Marxist organisation had grown in importance and had begun to change the nature and direction of the resistance movement in an effort to make it part of a larger national movement against the government's development and industrialisation policy. The Marxist organisation had announced a ban to stop the influx of foreigners into the mountains in order to build more sustainable grassroots resistance structures. NAN activists supported such a strategy and urged Jika to find other local youth to join the movement. Thus, the emergence of a new organisation changed the processes of mobilisation in Niyamgiri and the power dynamics between key actors because the resentment against international NGOs and their tactics diminished the latter's influence.

After Jika's defection, ActionAid continued with its parallel mobilisation internationally and organised another protest at Vedanta's AGM in London. The NGO presented a young tribal man to

the international audience claiming he was a Dongria Kondh, a claim countered by NAN activists and Dongria villagers who asserted that the youth was from a village in the plains and had nothing to do with the anti-mining movement in the mountains. After his return from London, the young man was seen together with Jika and openly admitted that he was not against the mine but had agreed to speak at the AGM only because of the opportunity to travel to London.

Although many were deeply disappointed at Jika's defection at a personal level, NAN activists and international NGOs claimed that grassroots resistance was still strong and had not been affected by Jika becoming a Vedanta supporter. None of the activists saw Jika's exit as an end point in the resistance movement and many pointed to the fluid nature of grassroots organising processes:

> Many people had projected him as a symbol of the movement. They became very disillusioned […] but it's a test for the dynamics of a movement also whether it can sustain [itself]. Some leaders will be taken over, some might be purchased, some will become frustrated. These things will happen and in the process new leadership also emerges. That is also the charm of a movement, we can say [laughs].
>
> (State level activist, March 2010)

The continued strong commitment among the Dongria to oppose the construction of the mine and the changing resistance structures were demonstrated during a mass gathering of tribal people on top of the Niyamgiri Mountain in the spring of 2010. Organised mainly by the Marxist organisation, the event was similar to the much-criticised mass worship first organised by ActionAid. The major difference was in the ownership of the event: whereas ActionAid's event was seeing as being externally imposed this time there was considerable local involvement of people and more grassroots mobilisation by the political organisation as well as support from NANs. And as a telling reflection of the shift in power dynamics, the gathering explicitly excluded foreign NGOs in an attempt to unite tribal people and poor farmers on the issue of land rights and anti-industrialisation struggles. An activist supported by the political organisation was sent to Niyamgiri where he took over Jika's earlier job, travelling from village to village and mobilising the Dongria Kondh against the mine. NAN activists claimed that as of March 2010, the resistance activities had become much more locally grounded as opposed to earlier phases where international NGOs and

activists had been the dominant actors in the anti-Vedanta movement.

Discussion and Conclusion

Our case study vividly illustrates the role of national advocacy networks in shaping local resistance and transnational dynamics, a role that has largely been neglected in the traditional boomerang model (Keck & Sikkink, 1998). We argue that in countries like India, with a strong civil society and long history of social movements it is critical to consider national and transnational dynamics within anti-corporate mobilisation over time (summarised in Figure 3). Our narrative also shows the tensions and disruptions that occur when diverse actors come together to mobilise against a common target. It appears that the presence of a strong NAN makes within-movement conflict more likely especially when a grassroots movement internationalises. It would be naive to assume that interactions within movements are purely benevolent and that the various individual and collective actors are easily aligned towards a common goal just because they claim to fight the same corporation. Our findings support and extend earlier work that argues that it is not the presence of transnational support per se that makes anti-corporate movements successful (Bebbington et al., 2008; Keck & Sikkink, 1998; McAteer & Pulver, 2009). Actors within transnational movements need to manage internal differences; national advocacy actors need to hold powerful transnational actors within such networks to account while dealing with corporate counter-mobilisation strategies at the same time. We find that in social movement organising NANs may or may not seek support from TANs and that their motives for doing so may be different from the usually assumed disparities in material resources, knowledge and influence. Nationally powerful NANs might seek transnational support to gain an *additional* arena in which to fight corporations while at the same time maintaining their powerful role nationally.

In addition, our case highlights the need for a process approach to studies of social movements. In the organisation studies literature, process thinking has been put forward as a way

to conceptualise organisation among networked actors (Hernes, 2008). Hernes and Bakken (2003), for example, conceptualise events as important decision points that are connected by processes. Jika's defection in that sense is an event that resulted from the processes of recruitment by NAN activists and international NGO actors and the elite defection tactics used by the pro-mining movement. While some scholars describe anti-corporate movements as a fixed coalition of actors confronting a corporation with a set of observable events that have particular outcomes (King & Soule, 2007; Soule, 2009), others adopt a more dynamic approach (Diani & McAdam, 2003; Koopmans, 2004). Emphasising the 'movement' in social movements, these studies focus on the 'ongoing accomplishment of collective action' (McAdam, 2003: 285). A process view on anti-corporate mobilisation tries to identify mechanisms that underlie particular events and strategic decisions by the involved actors to 'penetrate the logic behind observed temporal progressions' (Van de Ven & Poole, 1995: 1385). Based upon our empirical material, we identified internationalisation and localisation as two central processes in transnational anti-corporate movements that recursively interact under the influence of a third central process, counter-movement activities by the company (and the state). Figure 3 illustrates the processes unfolding within the social movement campaign against Vedanta in Niyamgiri.

Insert Figure 3 about here

We observed four mechanisms in each of these three central processes: internationalisation processes were characterised by scale shifts, brokerage, recruitment and publicity mechanisms. Mechanisms underlying localisation processes consisted of scale shifts, recruitment, politicisation and strategic adaptation while the mechanisms of counter-organising processes were strategic adaptation, lobbying, elite defection, CSR and public relations. This confirms earlier findings about mechanisms of social movement organising (Koopmans, 2004; McAdam, 2003; Walker 2009a).

Our main contribution is the integration of these mechanisms within a larger framework of the complementary and recursive anti-corporate movement organising processes of internationalisation and localisation and the consideration of the effects of counter-mobilisation on them. Using our model, we are able to draw a much clearer picture of the processes involved in anti-corporate social movement organising and corporate counter-organising in general, which can be expected to occur also in other cases of anti-corporate mobilisation.

Internationalisation is characterised by the mechanisms of scale shift – the 'shifting up' of movement activity from the grassroots and national level to the international realm, such as through the organisation of protest events at Vedanta's AGM. Scale shift often is a result of brokerage, where NAN activists connect grassroots struggles to international NGOs. Charles, albeit originally from the UK but deeply embedded in the NAN against Vedanta, brought the resistance movement against Vedanta to the attention of Survival International in London. He and other NAN activists shared their information with international NGOs to convince them to publicise the case abroad. Recruitment is another mechanism of the internationalisation process. Identification, selection and presentation of local spokespersons like Jika (and his replacement at Vedanta's AGM) at international events are key aspects of transnational mobilisation. Our narrative shows that recruitment of local people by international NGOs was a major reason for conflict within the movement and was criticised by NAN activists because the local recruits had nothing to do with the grassroots resistance movement or because NAN activists feared to lose control over the process of recruitment and publicity. Finally, publicity is a key internationalisation mechanism for transnational mobilisation. The story of the resistance movement depicted by impressive visuals and images of the Dongria Kondh, as in Ian's photos and Survival's documentary, was particularly appealing to Western audiences eager to take up the cause of a tribal community living in harmony with nature and battling a destructive multinational corporation. The Dongria Kondh were interesting enough for the international media to fill what has been labelled the 'tribal slot' – the

strategic use of indigenous identity primarily by Western NGOs to promote their movements (Bruijn & Whiteman, 2010; Li, 2000).

Localisation is a second process, also characterised by scale shift, this time from the international back to the national and grassroots levels. Localisation is fostered by politicisation of grassroots movement actors and their continued mobilisation around issues such as land rights and their growing links to local political organisations. The Marxist organisation and NAN activists played a key role in the politicisation of the Dongria Kondh. Mobilisation for these actors involved connecting the Dongria Kondh to a network of other struggles in Orissa that were attempting to change government policy on mineral investment and extraction. Finally, as in internationalisation processes, recruitment of suitable local leaders to mobilise and represent the movement at national and local events is a key mechanism in localisation. Jika's case clearly shows how such recruitment mechanisms can create conflicts and tensions between individual actors while causing disruptions in the resistance movement leaving key actors vulnerable to corporate counter-mobilisation strategies. Strategic adaptation was the final mechanism in localisation processes in our narrative. NAN and grassroots activists realised the potential of the mass-worship first organised by ActionAid and adapted the international NGO's strategy to publicise the tribe's struggle and obtain wide media coverage. Instead of welcoming this assimilation and localisation of their strategy, ActionAid continued to organize their own separate mass event. But NAN activists also emphasised differences, rather than commonalities with the NGO. This lack of collaboration reflects ideological differences and cleavages and the need to create and defend one's own 'turf' between actors at various levels in the anti-corporate movement that complicate transnational social movement organizing.

The last element of the model describes how corporate strategies can influence social movements through astroturf organising. While this phenomenon has not received much attention in the study of anti-corporate movements, a few recent studies have emphasised the need to pay more

attention to corporate non-market strategies directed at stakeholders, especially at the grassroots level (Walker, 2009a; 2009b). In the Niyamgiri case, CSR played a key role in counter-mobilisation or astroturfing. CSR literally and figuratively became a weapon used by the corporation to counter the resistance movement, culminating in the elite defection of Jika. We have described earlier how the company's CSR initiative of sponsoring a local youth club resulted in the severe beating of anti-Vedanta protestors by members of the same club using cricket bats purchased by the company. In 2012, Vedanta launched a massive CSR advertising campaign with the theme 'creating happiness' using local communities to sing the praises of the company and highlight the benefits created by mining. Pro-Vedanta actors also began publishing online videos with local testimonies – just like the resistance movement, which constitutes another case of strategic adaptation. At the political level, the company also engaged in extensive lobbying in an attempt to influence the government to support land acquisition, provide police protection for their construction activities as well as prevent the movement of activists and NGOs in the Niyamgiri area. Finally, Jika's story shows how corporate managers and other pro-mining supporters (allegedly businessmen from nearby towns) directly targeted key actors in the movement to convince them to change sides and support the mine. These elite defections had, at least temporarily, a destabilising effect on the resistance movement.

Future studies of anti-corporate movements should also pay more attention to the context in which transnational anti-corporate mobilisation occurs. When transnational advocacy is added to existing, and often very effective grassroots and national mobilisation, the complementary processes of internationalisation and localisation are set in motion. Anti-corporate movements need both elements: strong grassroots action and engagement at an international level to be successful when fighting multinational corporations. A transnational movement against the Niyamgiri mine alone, for example, would have not been able to halt the illegal deployment of construction vehicles in the mountain for which local people blocked the road in January 2008. Moreover, without strong

local resistance and the emergence of Jika as a tribal leader, the legitimacy of transnational engagement would have diminished. Investors would not divest from a company without receiving 'proof' of its destructive actions and grassroots resistance against it.

The efforts of NAN activists also significantly contributed to raising national awareness about the case through lodging cases in local and national courts, providing material used in various court cases, conducting protests in the capital, and supporting local people in filing claims against the government. These efforts also resulted in putting pressure on the Indian government and influenced the decisions of the environmental ministry and garnering support for the struggle from leading politicians. Moreover, it can be argued that through their efforts at connecting the Niyamgiri struggle to other struggles against mining across the state and country, NAN activists contributed to a more sustainable and long-term learning and mobilisation of communities affected by mineral development. Our adjusted boomerang model (Figure 1) adds such a national perspective to studies on transnational anti-corporate mobilisation that takes into account the national context of mobilisation and the historical mobilisation structures that might exist in many countries.

We believe that the concurrent processes of internationalisation and localisation are crucial in the context of social movement organising against multinational corporations. We have provided empirical evidence to develop our process model that explains the movement-countermovement dynamics of social movements, which we believe is a significant contribution to the field. Unlike most studies that focus on the origins of movements we have discussed how a particular social movement evolves over time, the power dynamics between key actors, conflicts and disruptions and the range of mobilisation and counter-mobilisation strategies employed (Meyer & Staggenborg 1996).

Despite the temporal arrangement of our process model we do not see the process of resistance as a neat, orderly and linear process but one that is fluid, multivalent and contested with feedback loops that breakdown alliances, create new ones, and produce new forms of behaviour

among key actors. The outcomes are multivalent in the sense that 'good' or 'bad' outcomes remain contextually based. For example, one could argue that Jika's defection was a bad outcome for the movement but a good outcome for him personally as he was able to get access to education and build a new life. That particular disruptive event, in part influenced by corporate strategies to co-opt resistance against mining, had consequences for subsequent actions of both, NANs and TANs as well as the Dongria Kondh. Thus, NANs and TANs provided the bridging mechanisms and chains of influence that informed actions at the local, national and transnational levels.

Epilogue

In September 2010 the Indian Ministry of Environment and Forests revoked the 'in principal' environmental clearance that had been granted to Vedanta for the mine at Niyam Dongar, and one month later also stalled the expansion of Vedanta's refinery. The Orissa Mining Corporation, Vedanta's partner in the project, is seeking to overturn this decision by appealing to the Indian Supreme Court. Hearings had not yet been conducted at the time of writing. While the ruling to stop the mine represents a remarkable victory for the movement, key actors continue their mobilisation and counter-mobilisation efforts. For example, Vedanta-sponsored local NGOs have petitioned the Orissa High Court to allow the refinery expansion; Jika released a music CD with traditional Dongria Kondh music as part of Vedanta's CSR to promote the tribe's culture; and the company has widely publicised a rally of tribal people from the foothills of Niyamgiri who demanded 'industry and development' for their area. The last of these pro-corporate protests happened in August 2012, amidst rumours that the refinery had to be shut down due to lack of cheap local bauxite. It appears that Jika has successfully been transformed into a pro-corporate community mobiliser. According to reports by activists, in late 2010 Jika played a key role in mobilising a Dongria community to deny access to a Survival International fact-finding team to the mountains.

In April 2012, due to extensive NAN lobbying and a 2011 report by Amnesty International that refuted Vedanta's environmental impact assessments, the Environment Ministry halted the environmental hearing process for the company's refinery expansion plans. In May 2012, the Forest Department even filed three cases against the CEO of Vedanta Aluminium Limited, under the Orissa Forest Act for encroaching village forest land for the refinery construction in 2004 – a victory for the movement that was widely reported in the UK where it was portrayed as a 'real-life Avatar' fight similar to the Hollywood blockbuster (Burke, 2012).

Locally, the situation remained full of tension and characterised by attempts to weaken the movement. In early 2012 local pro-Vedanta groups assaulted several Dongria Kondh members who were preparing for the annual mass-worship. Other Dongria were arrested on the charge of 'indulging in Maoist activities' (Mohanty, 2012). In August 2012, NAN activists revealed that Vedanta had donated nearly six million USD to political parties in the last three years. In the same month, executives reported that the Lanjigarh refinery might be shut down due to the additional costs of importing bauxite from other mines, which resulted in large pro-Vedanta demonstrations by factory workers and their families. By September it appeared that the anti-Vedanta movement had won at least a temporary victory – several national papers reported that the company planned to shut down the refinery in December 2012.

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Figures

Figure 1: Extended boomerang model

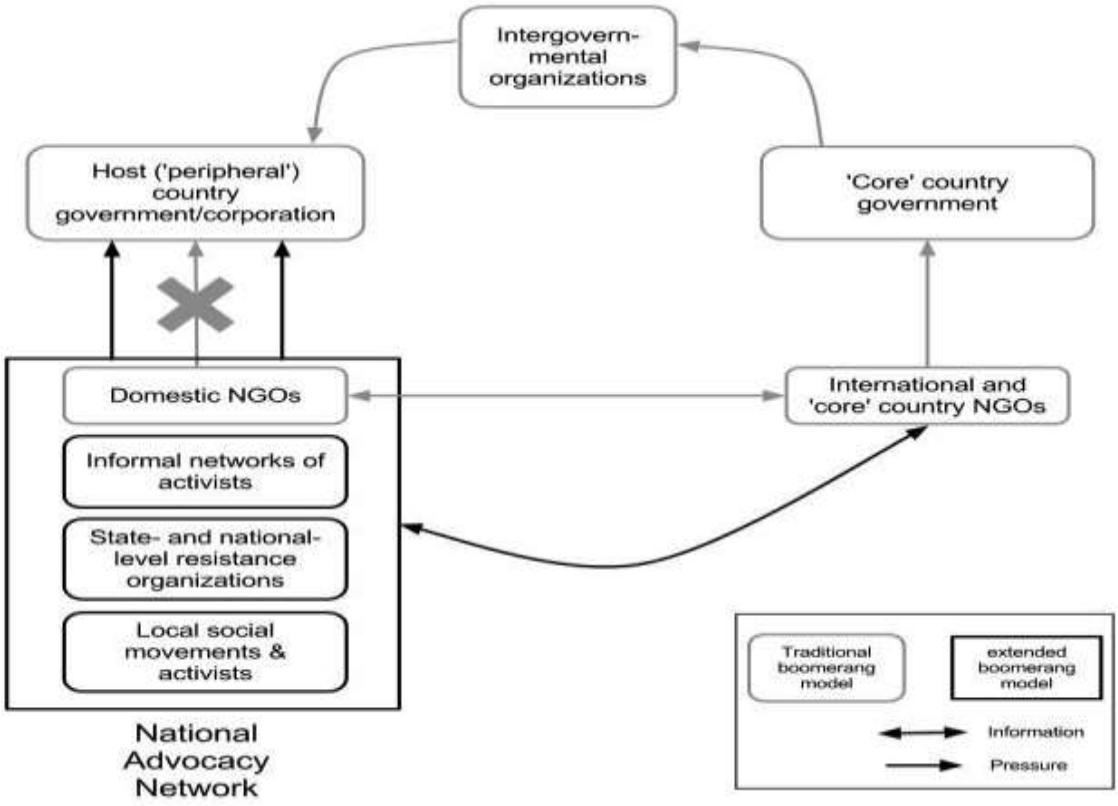


Figure 2: Process visual map of the mobilisation and counter-mobilisation around Vedanta's refinery and mine

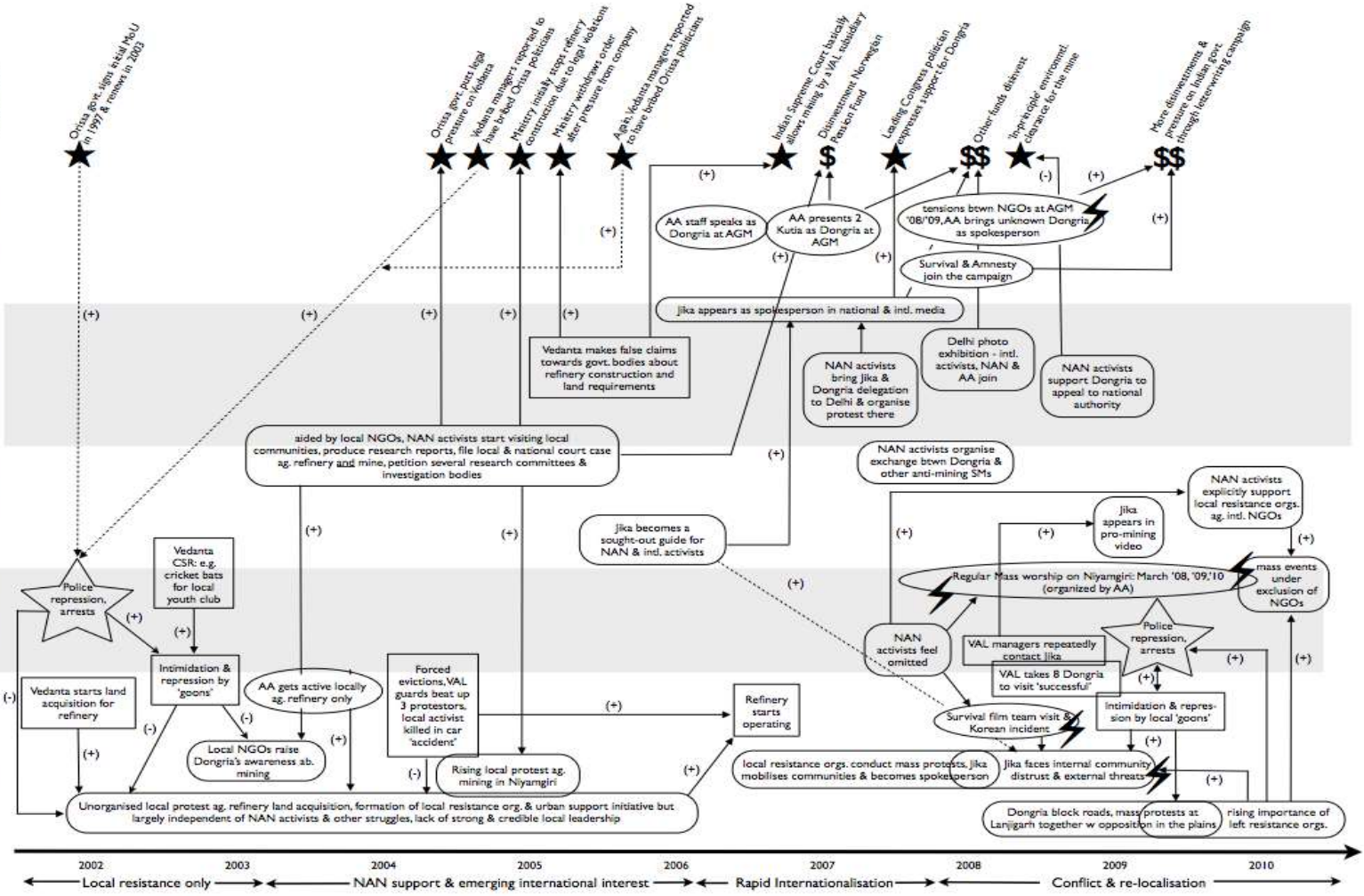
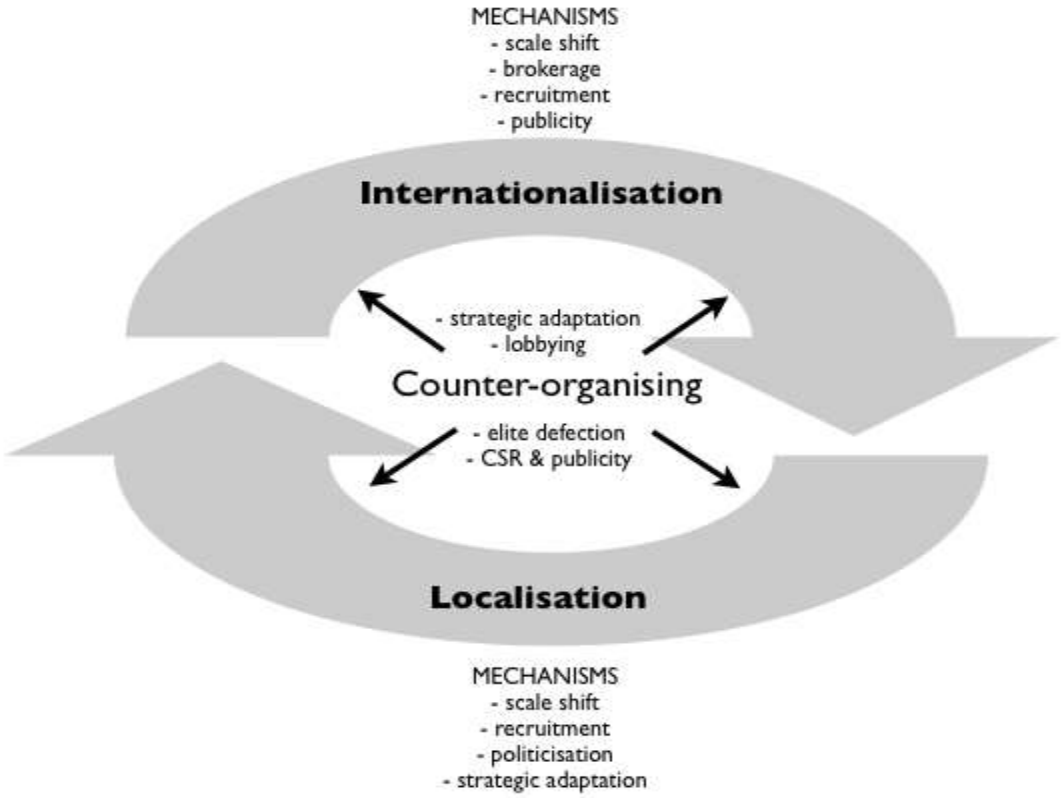


Figure 3: Transnational anti-corporate mobilisation and counter-mobilisation, a process model


MECHANISMS
- scale shift
- brokerage
- recruitment
- publicity
Internationalisation
- strategic adaptation
- lobbying
Counter-organising
- elite defection
- CSR & publicity
Localisation
MECHANISMS
- scale shift
- recruitment
- politicisation
- strategic adaptation