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# **Conflicts over Place between Indigenous Communities and Modern Capitalism**

**The Case of the Niyamgiri Hills, Orissa**

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## 1. Introduction

Economic development is often seen to go hand in hand with the spread of new markets. In mainstream contemporary discussions, it is fundamentally regarded as a positive and well-needed phenomenon that will save populations from poverty (see for instance UN, 1987; in UN, 2011). Nevertheless, indigenous peoples have repeatedly been subject to exploitation and dispossession of their ancient lands due to projects of economic development. In 2010, the International Work Group for Indigenous Affairs (IWGIA) commented on the 64 country reports on development projects that were to be discussed in the UN Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues the same year, saying that “events occurring in many parts of the world are better described as development aggression: the imposition of large-scale development schemes supposedly in the interest of national development, which lead to large-scale dispossessions and human rights violations” (IWGIA, 2010, p.13).

In his famous work, “Capitalism, Socialism and Democracy”, Joseph A. Schumpeter describes *creative destruction* as the essence of capitalism. Here, the destruction of old economic structures - in order to make way for new markets and modes of production - is seen as the engine of capitalism (Schumpeter, 1943, p. 83). Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels discussed the same phenomena in “The Communist Manifesto”, and the principle of creative destruction has thus been accepted as a fact by economist on all sides of the political spectra. However, the academic discourse on capitalism seldom concerns the sacrifices taken as geographical places are being opened up for market investments: What is being destroyed in the creative process?

Additionally, from a perspective of humanistic geography, the conflict between minority and majority, between large-scale projects of economic development and local community, also becomes a conflict between *place* and *space*. The *meaning of place* embedded in indigenous people’s ancient lands rebels against the spatial view of the landscape that is represented by outsiders such as multinational corporations and majority governments. This kind of clash between internal and external agents is of high geographical interest, as it represents a conflict between different geographical scales, between different meanings of place and space, as well as between local values and the values of capitalism and economic development.

Having this in mind, this study focuses on a contemporary conflict over the Niyamgiri Hills, located in the state of Orissa in India. Here, the indigenous tribe of the Dongria Kondh has populated the hills since centuries. The tribe is highly dependent on the mountains for livelihood, culture and religion. On the other hand, the British mining-company Vedanta Resources has found bauxite (the raw material for aluminum) at the top of the Dongria Kondh’s most sacred mountain, and the company now wishes to build a

mine at the place. Consequently, the thesis question of this study reads as follows:

### 1.1. Thesis Questions

- In what ways can humanistic geographical concepts of place and space be used in order to explain the conflict between the Dongria Kondh and Vedanta Resources? And what are the consequences of modern capitalism on indigenous placeboundness?

In order to answer the first question, the aim is to interpret and compare the meanings of place and space as expressed by the Dongria Kondh and Vedanta Resources within the literature with the help of humanistic geographical concepts of place and space. Thereafter, a broader discussion follows which aims to answer the second question. Bringing in other examples of situations where indigenous communities and projects of economic development have struggled over territory, the issue is discussed in relation to the results of the analysis of the case study.

### 1.2. Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is to explore how humanistic geographical concepts of place and space take form in the conflict between the Dongria Kondh and Vedanta Resources. The purpose is also to reach a greater understanding of the consequences of modern capitalism upon indigenous placeboundness.

### 1.3. Central Concepts

In order to clarify the use of certain central concept, this part of the study aims to define and discuss frequently used notions such as *(sustainable) economic development*, *place*, *space* and *indigenous peoples*. The concept of (sustainable) economic development is discussed since it normally brings with it an agenda of western liberal capitalism as it implies that market economies and economic growth are important factors in the reduction of world poverty. Hence, the common notion of economic development indirectly also brings with it the underlying principles of capitalism, such as the principle of Creative Destruction as noted by Joseph A. Schumpeter (see further '2.7. Theoretical Frameworks'). Place and space are commonly used concepts within humanistic geography, and will function as the main concepts throughout the analysis. The notion of indigenous peoples is defined since the specific cultural attributes of indigenous groups are central to the case study.

*Economic development* usually implies an increase within an economy's material standards and technology, as well as in the degree of skilled labor (Deardorf, 2000:2001). Internationally, the term 'sustainable economic development' is often used as a guideline for economic policy. Sustainable economic development is commonly defined as the UN World Commission on Environment and Development portrayed it in the classical report 'Our Common Future'. In the report, it is claimed that economic growth is the key to extinguishing poverty on Earth. However, use of resources needs to be restricted in a sustainable way that guarantees the same quality of life to future generations as we (primarily the western countries) enjoy today (UN, 1987 in UN, 2011).

The report is a great achievement of national agreement, but can be criticised for several reasons. First of all, the commonly accepted notion of economic sustainable development takes for granted that economic growth (and thus capitalism and free market economies) has the power of reducing poverty. This may be the fact, but any economically equalizing effect of capitalism is yet to be proven. For instance, former Chief Economist of the World Bank and current Director of the Paris School of Economics professor Francois Bourguignon highlights the fact that the relation between inequality, development and economic growth remain unclear (Bourguignon, 2011). He refers to the Human Development Report of 2010, which note that "despite much progress, inequality both within and across countries is growing" (ibid, 2011). One could face this critique by arguing that despite growing inequalities, the number of poor people has decreased, and this must be a good thing despite the inequalities. However, inequality implies much more than merely the inequalities of income: for instance, inequality within the level of social protection, freedom, and opportunities in life. This trap of inequality is very evident in for instance countries where there are conflicts between different groups (Bourguignon, 2011). Secondly, the founding principle of capitalism is an ever-increasing principle of growth, and thus, an ever-increasing use of the resources of the Earth. Whither this is compatible with environmentalist values can also be seen as doubtful.

Finally, the notion of economic development has often been criticized for holding a western bias, where development is seen as a linear function of growth. For instance, the critical writer Gustavo Esteva argues that: "In common parlance, development describes a process through which the potentialities of an object or organism are released, until it reaches its natural, complete, full-fledged form" (Esteva, 2001, p. 8). Hence, the notion of development brings with it a Darwinist evolutionary understanding of humanity, which gives "global hegemony to a purely Western genealogy of history, robbing peoples of different cultures of the opportunity to define the forms of their social life" (Esteva, 2001, p. 9). Esteva argues that today, the word development cannot be used without implying a multitude of hidden meanings such as growth and evolution. Thus, the word is always connected to an agenda that specifically favors western liberal capitalism. Furthermore, Esteva also highlights that the word development "indicates

that one is doing well because one is advancing in the sense of a necessary, ineluctable, universal law and toward a desirable goal" (Esteva, 2001, p. 10). Hence, economic development becomes hard to criticize, as the general understanding of (western liberal capitalistic) economic development is that it is the only rational alternative.

Post-development critics such as Esteva have not remained un-criticized themselves. For instance, Robins claim that "[t]he (over) emphasis on language, labels, text, culture and meaning in postmodernist critiques of 'development' draws attention away from these material realities, and what these may mean for actual human beings" (Robins, 2003, p. 270). Indeed, it is important to acknowledge that reducing poverty and human suffering is an important goal in itself, despite discussions on development. However, Esteva's argumentation remains very strong in the fact that he highlights the Western hegemony within the concept of economic development, as economic development is closely connected to the notion of capitalism and capitalist lifestyles.

The notion of *place* has, in humanistic geography, been given an "existential meaning" (Entrikin, 1976; in Peet, 1998, p. 35) as it has been "redefined as "center of meaning or a focus of human emotional attachment"" (ibid). As Pacione expresses it, place "is a part of but different from space. Place is a unique and special location in space notable for the fact that the regular activities of human beings occur there" (Pacione, 2009, p. 22). Moreover, since place is the location in space where human activity is centered, Pacione argues that "place may furnish the basis of our sense of identity as human beings, as well as our sense of community with others" (ibid). Hence, place - apart from being a geographical location - also inhibits a set of cultural characteristics or norms (Crang, 1998, p. 103). Place is thus a complex phenomena, comprising the individual's identity with its surroundings, as well as the interaction with the community found at the place. Newcomers are faced with this set of cultural norms, are socialized into them and become a part of the shared experience of the community (ibid.). If they are not, they may have to pay the price of not fitting into the community (Clark et al., 2003, p. 8).

*Space* is sometimes viewed as a much more scientific term than place (Crang, 1998, p. 100-102), traditionally connected to an idea of space as objectivity. However, humanistic geography based upon phenomenology criticizes this understanding. As Peet writes: "the space which Galileo, Descartes, and Newton characterized as homogenous expanse, equivalent in all directions, and not perceptible to the senses, is neither the sole, nor the genuine, objective space" (Peet, 1998, p. 61). Space, like place, is experienced and thus ordered by humans and human activity (ibid). However, space differs from place since it presents an outsider view (which most likely can be experienced as 'objective' by the viewer). One could think of it as different visual focuses: Whilst place is experienced from the inside by an insider (for instance an inhabitant), space is viewed from a distance by an observer (Crang, 1998, p. 104). Thus, it can be argued that

the place can become a space when viewed by an outside observer, while still remaining a place for the insider (Crang, 1998, p. 110). Drawing this line of thought a bit further, the notion of place naturally brings with it a 'bottom-up', grassroots perspective as the agents inside the place experience the place with their minds and senses in their everyday life. The notion of space, on the other hand, can be claimed to inherit a 'top-down', over-view perspective, such as the perspective of planning, maps or geographical information systems (GIS). However, as Peet reminds us, this latter view is no less free of human experiencing and interpretation than the previous.

The notion of *indigenous peoples* is hard to define. The United Nations (UN) and International Labour Organization (ILO) have discussed the issue for decades, and have not yet agreed on a common definition. However, one of the most cited definitions is Jose R. Martinez Cobo's, UN Special Rapporteur of the Sub-Commission of Prevention of Discrimination and Protection of Minorities:

“Indigenous communities, peoples and nations are those which, having a historical continuity with pre-invasion and pre-colonial societies that developed on their territories, consider themselves distinct from other sectors of the societies now prevailing on those territories, or parts of them. They form at present non-dominant sectors of society and are determined to preserve, develop and transmit to future generations their ancestral territories, and their ethnic identity, as the basis of their continued existence as peoples, in accordance with their own cultural patterns, social institutions and legal system” (in UN, 2004).

From the definition above, it is easy to depict the importance of territory in questions concerning indigenous groups. The UN Experts Seminar on Indigenous Land Rights and Claims recognizes the "distinctive spiritual and material relationship" (UN, 1996) between indigenous peoples and their lands, as well as the link between self-determination and land rights as a vital issue within the discussion concerning development and the cultural identity of indigenous peoples (ibid). The issue of indigenous peoples' land rights is a perennial problem for indigenous peoples today (Sametinget, 2010), for cultural as well as livelihood reasons. Eviction of indigenous peoples from their ancient lands, territories and natural resources is one of the biggest dilemmas for indigenous peoples in rich as well as poor countries (ibid).

#### 1.4. Methodology

The study relies on *secondary data*, and is thus entirely a *literature study*. Because of the nature of the topic, interviews with the Dongria Kondh would have been a useful source of primary data in this study. However, for reasons of economy and time this has been impossible to accomplish. Instead, the study relies on NGO and governmental reports that are based upon interviews with the Dongria Kondh, as well as information posted on

the homepage of Vedanta Resources about the company (*see further critical discussion in 1.5. Source Criticism*). In order to back up the historical reasoning, other literature such as newspaper articles and previous research on the subject of indigenous peoples in India, and issues of indigenous peoples and land rights in general, are to be used.

Concerning the fact that the study builds upon secondary data, one can argue that even if the study would be based upon interviews with the Dongria Kondh, it would have been impossible within the frames of this bachelor thesis to conduct interviews of the same scope as in the main sources of this study, that is, the Amnesty International report “Don’t Mine Us Out of Existence– Bauxite mine and refinery devastate lives in India” (Amnesty International, 2010) or in the fact finding report “Report of the four member committee for investigation into the proposal submitted by the Orissa mining company for bauxite mining in Niyamgiri” (Baviskar et al., 2010) submitted to the Indian Ministry of Environment & Forests. The analysis of this study will instead aim to ‘read between the lines’ of what is being stated in the literature that is based upon interviews with the Dongria Kondh. Especially the many quotations of members of the Dongria Kondh tribe that are to be found in the Amnesty International report can be seen as useful material.

The study relies on *qualitative method*. The field of qualitative studies within the social sciences is vast, and includes a multitude of different methodologies. The lowest common denominator among qualitative approaches is however the goal of *understanding* why social phenomena appear the way they do. Ragin et al. explains the importance of qualitative social sciences as such: “Often, researchers do not want /.../ broad views of social phenomena because they believe that a proper understanding can be achieved only through in-depth examination of specific cases. Indeed, qualitative researchers often initiate research with a conviction that big-picture representations seriously misrepresent or fail to represent important social phenomena” (Ragin et al, 2011, p. 81). Within this study, the aim is to gain a deeper understanding of how conflicts over place could be interpreted with the help of humanistic geographical concepts of place and space, rather than to seek causal explanations or material for generalization.

The method applied in this study is taken from the book ‘Case Studies and Theory Development in the Social Sciences’ by Alexander L. George and Andrew Bennet, and is called ‘*structured focused comparison*’ (George et al., 2005, p. 67). The method has often been used in order to analyze historical events and phenomena “in ways that would draw the explanations of each case of a particular phenomenon into a broader, more complex theory” (ibid).

By using case studies, or even single case studies, structured focused comparison based upon a theoretical framework can thus, at best, help to further develop a theory. Using the method, the researcher “asks a set of standardized, general questions of each case, even in single case studies”

(George et al., 2005, p. 69). The questions are to be carefully worked out so that they are closely related to the theory that the study relies on and “to reflect the research objective” (George, et al., 2005, p. 69). If done properly, “[t]he method is “structured” in that the researcher writes general questions that reflect the research objective and that these questions are asked of each case under study to guide and standardize data collection, thereby making systematic comparison and cumulation of the findings possible. The method is “focused” in that it deals only with certain aspects of the historical cases examined” (George et al., 2005, p. 67).

Based on the method of structured focused comparison, the questions used in order to ask the data are the following:

- Based upon the literature; How can the two parties' meanings of space be interpreted with the help of the humanistic geographical concept of space? How do these meanings clash?
- Based upon the literature; How can the two parties' meanings of place be interpreted with the help of the humanistic geographical concept of place? How do these meanings clash?

These questions have been continuously asked to the literature that stands as a basis for the analysis, namely (as previously mentioned) the Amnesty International Report “Don’t mine us out of existence – Bauxite mine and refinery devastate lives in India” (Amnesty International, 2010), the fact finding report submitted to the Indian Ministry of Environments & Forests by Ph. D researchers N.C. Saxena, S. Parasuraman, Promode Kant and Amita Bayiskar named “Report of the four member committee for investigation into the proposal submitted by the Orissa mining company for bauxite mining in Niyamgiri” (Baviskar et al., 2010), as well as the information provided on the web-page of Vedanta Resources (Vedanta Resources, 2011e). The method thus becomes a method of sorting and shifting the information through a kind of coding system, which in turn relates directly to the questions posed according to the method of structured focused comparison. As these questions connect directly to the first thesis question, it will lead us forward towards an answer to this one. Following the results of the analysis leading us towards an answer to the first thesis question, a more general discussion will be held taking in other examples of where the placeboundness of indigenous communities have been confronted with modern capitalism through projects of economic development. This discussion will aim to approach an answer to the second thesis question.

The study is a *single case study*. However, the usefulness of comparative methods within this case study is evident, as there are two main actors within the conflict, namely the Dongria Kondh and Vedanta Resources. Therefore, it is possible to make use of structured questions in order to address the meaning of place of both actors, and then use the results of this structured focused questioning in order to compare these. Later on in the discussion, the study will also make use of other examples of when

indigenous communities have been confronted with projects of economic development. These cases all have their lowest common denominator in the fact that there seems to be a conflict of values between indigenous communities on the one hand and projects of economic development on the other hand.

The study can be claimed to be *deductive* as the thesis is based upon humanist geography theoretical concepts of place and space, as well as the theory of creative destruction. The study takes the phenomena of creative destruction as given as it is a commonly accepted observation among liberal economists as well as Marxists. The study aims to test as well as to further develop its theoretical framework: From the assumption that creative destruction exists, an attempt to test the explanatory power of geographical concepts of place and space is made. Also, the study attempts to develop the humanist geographical concepts of place and space within the span of conflict between indigenous peoples and projects of economic development.

Finally, one could highlight the critique that Bergström et al. puts forward towards to what Foucault calls the “language of ‘truth’” (Bergström et al., 2005, p. 173) [Authors translation]. I wish to emphasize at this point that I am not intending to write down the history of what has actually happened in the Niyamgiri Hills. Perhaps this is not even possible. In fact, one could argue that in these cases, truth is relative since the involved actors (individuals, tribes, companies, NGO’s, etc.) are all convinced that they are right.

I am also aware that there might be other events, loyalties and emotions that have fuelled the conflict. One such variable would for instance be pure economics, as the Dongria Kondh are dependent of the mountains for their livelihood and Vedanta Resources would naturally want to earn more money through investment. However, I would like to argue that the notion of human sense and meaning of place does not leave out other explanatory variables. How an individual, a group or community relates to place or space is more of a fundamental, perhaps even unconscious level of the human mind, than rational explanations to conflict such as economics, etc.

### 1.5. Source Criticism

The analysis is based primarily on two reports: the Amnesty International Report “Don’t mine us out of existence – Bauxite mine and refinery devastate lives in India” (Amnesty International, 2010), and a fact finding report submitted to the Indian Ministry of Environments & Forests by Ph. D researchers N.C. Saxena, S. Parasuraman, Promode Kant and Amita Bayiskar named “Report of the four member committee for investigation into the proposal submitted by the Orissa mining company for bauxite mining in Niyamgiri” (Baviskar et al., 2010). Furthermore, the web-page of Vedanta Resources (Vedanta Resources, 2011e) has also been used as a basis for analysis.

As stated earlier, this study is a literature study and thus relies entirely on secondary sources. Secondary sources can be problematic as they “reflect the aims and attitudes of the people and organizations that collected the data” (Flowerdew et al., 2005, p. 69) and the representativeness of secondary sources should always be thought over (Flowerdew et al., 2005, p. 64). The reports above clearly take the moral position of protecting the tribal community and the Niyamgiri Hills from the mining of Vedanta Resources. Equally, the web-page of Vedanta Resources argues for the case of the company, as well as for the need for economic development in Orissa through investments within the natural resources that are to be found there. Hence, neither the reports nor the web-page of Vedanta Resources can be seen as politically neutral. However, in this study the goal is to look for evidences of the different parties’ sense-of-place towards the Niyamgiri Hills. Since the reports are built upon research that are large at scope – much larger than a bachelor student could ever dream of accomplishing – they are very useful as they build on a multitude of data (such as focus-group discussions, one-to-one interviews, interviews with government officials and with civil society groups) (Amnesty International, 2010, p. 8; Baviskar et al., 2010). In the same time, what is expressed within the web-page of Vedanta Resources also tells us something of the founding principles of the company, the view upon the Niyamgiri Hills, and so forth. Therefore, the study rather aims to read between the lines of what is being said, rather than to interpret this as an absolute truth.

The theoretical framework relies on a number of sources. When discussing the principle of creative destruction within capitalism, the study relies on the concept as it was first mentioned in Joseph A. Schumpeter’s classical work "Capitalism, Socialism and Democracy" from 1943 (Schumpeter, 1943), and in "The Communist Manifesto" by Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels in 1848 (Marx et al., 2004). These classics both agree on the concept of creative destruction, despite opposing opinions on the positive or negative features of the phenomena. When discussing the phenomenology of place and space from a perspective of humanistic geography, the analysis relies on the parts of phenomenology that are presented as specifically applicable on human geography by Mike Crang in the book *Cultural Geography* (Crang, 1998). Building on this, the focus lies on the writings of humanist geographers that have further developed the notions of place and space from a phenomenological perspective. The primary source here is a book called "Space and Place - The Perspective of Experience" (Tuan, 1977) by the human geography professor Yi-Fu Tuan. Tuan's contribution to the debate on place and space - a debate previously dominated by a dichotomy between positivists and cultural geographers – has been to "break out of the conflict by arguing that space and place, far from being rivals for geographical attention, should be seen as being complementary one to the other" (Taylor, 1999, p. 10). In his book, Tuan talks about the relations between the human and her environment from historical, mythological as well as contemporary perspectives. He discusses the experience of place and space for the universal human being, and hence, the phenomenology of place and space

(Tuan, 1977). Therefore, Tuan's book is frequently used throughout this study.

## 1.6. Limitations

As earlier mentioned, interviews of the Dongria Kondh would have been a good source of primary data within this study. This time around, I will have to rely on secondary data that is based partly upon interviews. However, I strongly recommend future researchers on the subject to explore the possibility of using interviews.

## 2. Theoretical Framework

This section presents the theoretical framework of the study. The theoretical framework consists of two theories; *1.7.1. Creative Destruction* and *1.7.2. The Phenomenology of Place and Space*. The Creative Destruction of capitalism implies that as capitalism grows, it naturally brings with it a conflict of lifestyles, where the old is replaced by the new, or as Marx et al. claimed, where “[a]ll that is solid melts into air” (Marx et al., 2004, p. 7) Humanistic geography’s concepts of place and space – which are influenced by philosophy’s phenomenology – aims to explore issues such as the essences of cultural identity and tradition through looking at people’s relation to place and space.

The reason that these two theoretical frameworks are used within the study is that they share a common denominator. In discussions of the concepts of place and space within humanistic geography - where the experienced meanings of place and space are often discussed - issues of cultural identity becomes very important. Some cultural identities are always attached to places – real or imaginary. In the mean time, Creative Destruction of capitalism naturally implies that old meanings of place will be challenged and conquered by the powers of capitalism. Thus, since cultural identities and places are so closely connected (in some cases more than others), and old cultural identities, traditions and meanings of places are challenged by the very nature of capitalism, both of the theoretical frameworks are useful in discussions on conflicts over changing lifestyles, challenged meanings of place and cultural identity.

### 2.1. Creative Destruction

Joseph A. Schumpeter once presented a commonly accepted notion about the essence of capitalism:

“The fundamental impulse that sets and keeps the capitalist engine in motion comes from the new consumer’s goods, the new methods of production or transportation, the new markets, the new forms of industrial organization that capitalist enterprise creates. /.../ The opening of new markets /.../ incessantly revolutionizes the economic structure *from within*, incessantly destroying the old one, incessantly creating a new one. This process of Creative Destruction is the essential fact about capitalism.” (Schumpeter, 1943, p. 83).

Schumpeter’s reasoning about Creative Destruction clearly illustrates the Janus-face of capitalism. Creative Destruction drives the capitalist system forward. It gives the capitalist system its most evident characteristics: On the one hand, an everlasting increase in production and consumption, a never ending spiral of growth, constantly winning new geographical ground. On the other hand, capitalism needs to overcome its obstacles for expansion: it demands sacrifices in order for the process to proceed.

What then, is being sacrificed? Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels described the phenomenon in a more negative tone in the Communist Manifesto:

“The bourgeoisie cannot exist without constantly revolutionizing the instruments of production, and thereby the relations of production, and with them the whole relations of society”/.../“The need of a constantly expanding market for its products chases the bourgeoisie over the entire surface of the globe. It must nestle everywhere, settle everywhere, establish connexions [sic!] everywhere. /.../ It compels all nations, on pain of extinction, to adopt the bourgeois mode of production” (Marx et al., 2004, p. 7-8).

On the one hand, the latter statement talks about a spread markets. However, on the other hand, the statement implies something more, namely a global spread of a capitalist lifestyle. This lifestyle, according to Marx and Engels, becomes unavoidable to everyone due to the nature of capitalism.

## 2.2. The Phenomenology of Place and Space

According to Mike Crang, there are three aspects within philosophy’s phenomenology that can be very useful in humanistic geography’s discussion of place, the human, and her relationship to the surrounding environment. These are 1) Husserl’s concept of intentionality, 2) the theory of essences, and 3) the existentialist ideas of the nature of life and knowledge (Crang, 1998, p. 107).

First of all, on *intentionality*, Husserl main point is that there is much more to the world than the observable world that we take for granted in our daily lives. Husserl’s main point is that the most fundamental structure of conscious life is intentionality. This means that we are always directed towards various objects and things in our being-related to the world, to other

people and to ourselves. To describe the whole structure of this being-related-to in all its various forms is the general task of a phenomenological intentional analysis (Husserl, 1998, p. 199). Crang explains basic intentionality by taking the example of a football. The football is a thing and it is taken for granted that we use the football to play football with. The football is thus loaded with a set of cultural norms that we take for granted in the society we live in. Husserl meant that “bracketing out preconceptions and thinking afresh about the taken-for-granted assumptions in everyday life” (Crang, 1998, p. 107-108) would give the human a higher level of objective knowledge (Brink, 2010, p. 36-39). Objects, according to Husserl, “must always be seen as objects *for* human subjects: as objects that human subjects *experience* (or gain *consciousness* of), and as objects towards which human beings always possess *intentions* of using or interacting with (however *un-* or *sub-*consciously)” (Cloeke et. al., 1991, p.72).

Husserl’s intentionality can be fruitfully adopted upon the meaning of place, as places are not only geographical points but also inheritors of a set of cultural intentions. The same principle of symbology and set of cultural norms that is given to things (such as the football) is also given to places (ibid). This implies that we can dissect the meaning of places for different agents in the same way as we can analyze the intentionality of things. Hence, one place can inhabit several meanings, cultural norms and symbologies (Crang, 1998, p. 108-110). As mentioned above, the goal of Husserl’s phenomenology was to attain a higher knowledge, or more objective truth about things. Humanistic geography differs from philosophical phenomenology since the focus lies upon the meanings of place – the intentionality given to them by humans – rather than being able to look beyond the intentionality of places. It is in fact the intentionality that is interesting for human geographers to study, as the meaning of place both shapes and reshapes the place and the people at the place.

Secondly, the former way of reasoning connects closely to the idea of the *essence* of things, which can be applied to the idea within cultural geography about *genius loci*, that is, “the unique spirit of place” (Crang, 1998, p. 108). The idea of *genius loci* rests upon the understanding that there is something more to a place than simply the observable. Users of a place experience something else, a unique spirit of the place that brings the place meaning. Crang questions earlier understandings of a universal *genius locus*. Rather, Crang argues that the spirit, or meaning, of place is experienced differently by different users (ibid). A person with no earlier experience of nature may become very frightened if being alone in a forest, while a person with experience may feel more secure in the forest than in for instance a city. How we connect to places often depends more upon ourselves - our history, social heritage and status, religious beliefs, cultural identity - than upon the actual place.

Thirdly, the existentialist’s (mainly Heidegger, but also writers such as Sartre) *nature of life and knowledge* claims that it is the surrounding that turns us into what we are, and that we, as humans, are defined by our

surroundings: “The human subject only becomes able to think and act /.../ through *being-in-the-world*” (Crang, 1998, p.109). According to Crang, this has two important implications: “First, people tend to think and act through material objects. Thus a place is a product of how we interact with it – we have different intentions towards a place if we live there, work there or are passing through on a journey. These all produce different ‘places’ for us” (Crang, 1998, p. 109). The human mind, as it is defined by its surroundings, cannot exist on its own: “consciousness is always conscious of something, not free-floating, and it starts from our position in the world” (ibid).

Heidegger connects this to the notion of care, and claims that we as humans have different types and levels of care for different things at different times. Our general knowledge, according to Heidegger, starts out and is based upon our “centers of ‘care’ about the world” (Crang, 1998, p. 110). Drawing from this line of reasoning, one can argue that we as humans always “make sense of the world through the materials at hand” (ibid), and that how we experience the world is through a holistic experience rather than a rational and abstract schema (Crang, 1998, p. 110).

Finally, the geography professor Yi-Fu Tuan has further developed the thoughts around the phenomenology of space and place in his book "Place and Space - The Perspective of Experience" (Tuan, 1977). He claims that how people know a place can be of great importance when it comes to fundamental human issues of for instance identity, the attachment to homeland and religion (Tuan, 1977, p. 149-160). The thoughts of Tuan will be further elaborated with in the analysis as the phenomenological meaning of place and space presents the very root of this study.

### **3. Background: The Dongria Kondh and Vedanta Resources**

The case that forms the primary focus of this study is, as mentioned in the introduction, the conflict in Orissa (India) between the indigenous tribe of the Dongria Kondh and the mining company Vedanta Resources. This chapter outlines some background information needed in order to comprehend the scope of the conflict. First of all, part ‘2.1. *Tribal India: Pre and Post Independence*’ introduces the reader with a historical background to the indigenous peoples' situation in India. Secondly, part ‘2.2. *The Dongria Kondh*’ talks about the Dongria Kondh and their relationship to the Niyamgiri Hills. Finally, part ‘2.3 *Vedanta Resources*’ presents the reader to some basic information on how the company Vedanta Resources and their business is structures worldwide, what their strategic goals and objectives are, and so on.

### 3.1. Tribal India: Pre and Post Independence

India gained independence from the British in 1947. Many different national and religious groups dwelled in the enormous sub-continent, and all tried to get their share of the cake as the new constitution was being written. After the 1st report on minority rights had been released in August 1947, assembly member Jaipal Singh reacted strongly towards the fact that tribal Indians - the Adivasi (meaning 'original inhabitants') - had been completely left out of the report. Jaipal Singh was a tribal himself from the state of Bihar, who had been sent by missionaries to study at Oxford University (Guha, 2007, p.115-117).

Singh claimed the Adivasis were in fact the most exploited group throughout Indian history (Guha, 2007, p.115-117). Due to his protests, a sub-committee was established in order to investigate the conditions of India's tribal population. It turned out that tribal communities had been victims of mass-scale exploitation by the Hindu society (along with British colonizers). The Hindu society "had done little to bring them [the Adivasis] modern facilities of education and health; it had colonized their land and forests; and it had brought them under a regime of usury and debt" (Guha, 2007, p. 116). In many cases, Adivasis had been dispossessed of their ancestral lands by landlords, and then put into debt by these landlords or other moneylenders (Guha, 2007, p. 115-117).

The findings of the sub-committee resulted in additions in the constitution in order to protect Adivasis from discrimination and exploitation. The 5<sup>th</sup> schedule of the Indian constitution groups tribal peoples that the sub-committee considered were in large need of jurisdictional protection together as Scheduled Tribes, and reserves seats in the legislature as well as governmental jobs for Adivasis (Guha, 2007, p. 117). The 5<sup>th</sup> schedule also recognizes "the rights of tribals over ancestral land and prohibit its transfer to non-tribals" (Ramachandran, 2010). So, the Indian constitution offers protection of the rights and land properties of the indigenous communities. However, constitutional rights are not always compatible with reality, as tribal communities still face discrimination and harassments.

One example of the discrepancy between the constitution and real life concerns tribal land rights. The government can give specific permission for land acquisition "under the notion of public purpose" (Khatua et al., 2006, p. 150). Hence, the nation or state government can confiscate Adivasi ancestral land if the confiscation can be argued to be of public interest, such as the public interest of economic development. Sudha Ramachandran claims that "much land has been taken over by the state for 'development projects' like dams and mining" (Ramachandran, 2010). Sudeep Chakravati writes that 40 million people (tribals and non-tribals) have been displaced since independence due to the founding of dams and other big industries (Chakravati, 2008, p. 14).

This economic development is however a process that the tribal communities seldom gets a share of. Despite that mining companies often give promises of compensation (in the form of money, jobs, health care and education) to tribal communities, "evicted tribals have never been properly compensated or rehabilitated" (IWGIA, 2010, p. 413). The Indian government's Ministry of Tribal Affairs noted in their annual report of 2008-2009 that:

"Resource rich areas of the country, located largely in the traditional habitats of the Scheduled Tribes, have been looked upon as the resources of the entire country and have been exploited for the nation, unfortunately by extinguishing the rights of the local inhabitants, mainly by paying nominal monetary compensation only for land. Tribal communities quite often had their habitats and homelands fragmented, their cultures disrupted, their communities shattered, and have been converted from owners of the resources and well-knit contented communities to individual wage earners in urban agglomerates with uncertain futures" (Ministry of Tribal Affairs in IWGIA, 2010, p. 413).

In India overall, "[t]he extractive sector investments have largely failed to translate into improvements in the overall living standards of most people" (Amnesty International, 2010, p. 10). The so called 'central tribal belt' - the Indian states with the highest concentration of tribal population, stretching from Rajasthan in the west to the West Bengal in the east (IWGIA, 2010, p. 406) - comprise the less fortunate in the Indian economic boom. Nobel-prize winner economist Amartya Sen claims that there is a risk that if these inequalities continue to grow, "one half of India will come to look and live like California, the other half like Sub-Saharan Africa" (Guha, 2007, p. 711). According to Guha, Orissa is probably the state that has suffered the most from the governmentally ordered liberalizations of the Indian market that took place in 1991:

"Whether reckoned in terms of land, income, health facilities or literacy rate, they lag behind the state as a whole. The tribals are heavily dependent on the monsoon and on the forest for survival. With the woods disappearing, and the rains sometimes failing, they have plunged deeper into poverty, as manifested periodically in deaths from starvation" (Guha, 2007, 707-708).

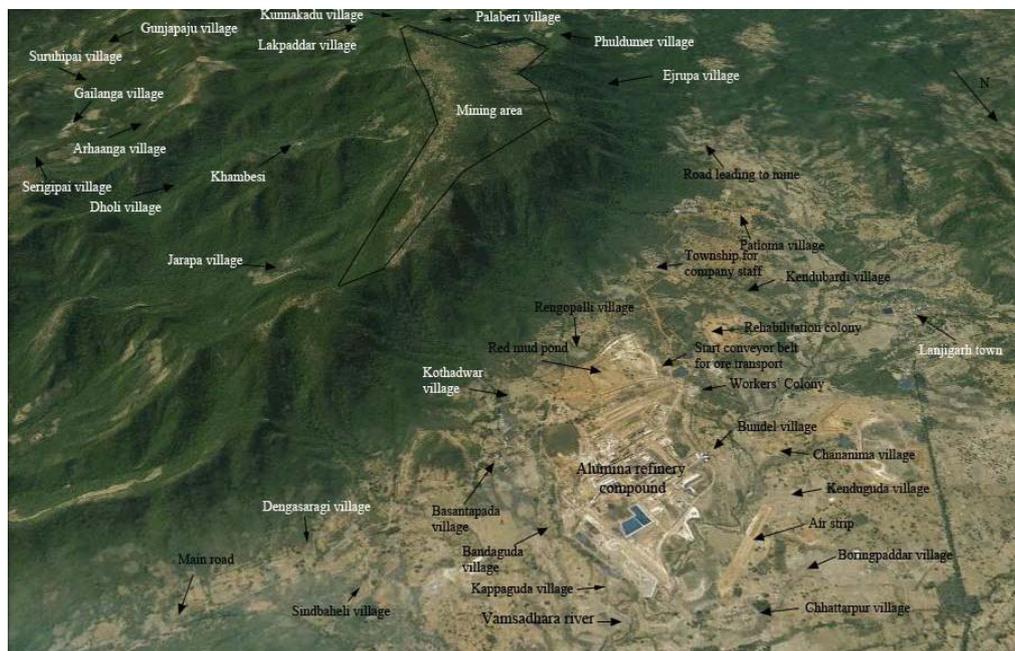
Statistics strengthen Guha's argumentation. In Orissa and Chhattisgarh, approximately 55 percent of the rural population lives on less than Rs 12 per day. In the states of Bihar, Madhya Pradesh and Jharkhand, it is about 46-47 percent of the rural population (Chakravati, 2008, p. 6). Rs 12 is approximately 0.02 USD, or 0.13 SEK. Also, the issue of farmers' indebtedness remains a big problem in rural India (Chakravati, 2008, p. 16).

### 3.2. The Dongria Kondh

India's indigenous population is a scattered group, as ethnicity, tradition, culture and language differ from tribe to tribe. However, most Indian tribals are small-scale pastoral farmers (Shah, 2004, p. 93). In 2010, 461 groups were recognized as Scheduled Tribes, comprising a total of 8.2 percent of the Indian population. There are however other ethnic groups that would be able to get the status of Scheduled Tribe, but who have not yet been officially recognized (IWGIA, 2010).

The Dongria Kondh is an indigenous tribe of approximately 8000 people (Amnesty International, 2010, p. 17) who are populating the Niyamgiri Hills in the east of the state Orissa in India since centuries. The word Dongria "comes from the word *dongar* or mountain" (Amnesty International, 2010, p. 21), and the Dongria Kondh are thus the people of the hills. The Dongria Kondh sees the hills as belonging to all Dongria Kondhs and all other tribals in the area collectively. The Dongria Kondh are completely self-sufficient as the mountains provide them with food, firewood, medical plants and wood for constructing houses. Amnesty International quotes an elderly Dongria Kondh woman: "We are poor, but /.../ we get everything we need from the Hills, it gives us everything but salt" (Amnesty International, 2010, p. 23).

*Figure 3.1. Map over the proposed mining area, the Niyamgiri Hills and surrounding villages.*



(Source: Amnesty International, 2010, p. 4).

The Niyamgiri Hills are also a vital part of the Dongria Kondh's spiritual, cultural and religious life. The Niyamgiri Hills are sacred to the Dongria Kondh. Amnesty International states that:

"They [the Dongria Kondhs] worship Niyam Raja Penu, a male deity represented in the form of a sword, believed by them to be living on top of the Niyamgiri Hills. They also believe that this male deity provides water which sustains all plant, animal, human life in the hills and reaches the earth. They also worship the earth or Dharani Mata, a female deity embodied in a wooden structure in every hamlet" (Amnesty International, 2010, p. 22).

Spiritual beliefs of heaven, earth and everything in between are thus closely connected with the physical place of the Niyamgiri Hills. Also, the ways of worshipping, traditions, wedding rituals, songs, dances and dressing codes of Dongria Kondh are all strongly linked to the hills (Amnesty International, 2010, p. 25-26). The distinct culture of the Dongria Kondh also affects the way they cultivate the country. The tribe cultivates the slopes of the Niyamgiri Hills, as each family cultivates "along a particular patch of the hill slope and then /.../ [shift] after a decade to enable the slope to become fertile again" (ibid). However, the tribe is very careful with cutting down trees. One man explains why to Amnesty International: "'We do not cut down trees on top of the hill, we will only ever remove some branches if needed, because we believe that the trees provide shade to Niyam Raja'" (Amnesty International, 2010, p. 24). It is also from religious reasons that the Dongria Kondh only cultivates the slopes of the hills, and not the top of it (Amnesty International, 2010, p. 26).

### 3.3. Vedanta Resources

Vedanta Resources is "India's largest non-ferrous metals and mining company based on revenues" (Vedanta Resources, 2011a) with over 30 000 employees. The company is listed at the Frankfurt stock exchange and has its base in London. The activities of Vedanta Resources is mainly located in India, but the company also has businesses in Zambia and Australia, and focuses mainly on aluminium, copper, zinc and iron (Vedanta Resources, 2011a; Vedanta Resources, 2011c). The company is the 'mother company' of nine smaller corporations, such as for instance Vedanta Aluminium Ltd who now have their headquarters at the Niyamgiri Hills in Orissa (Vedanta Resources, 2011c).

Figure 3.2: Group Structure of Vedanta Resources



(Source: Vedanta Resources 2011c.)

Vedanta Resources believe that their “experience in operating and expanding /.../ businesses in India will allow /.../ [them] to capitalise on attractive growth opportunities arising from India’s large mineral reserves, relatively low cost of operations and large and inexpensive labour and talent pools” (Vedanta Resources, 2011a).

## 4. Analysis

In the analysis, part 4.1 *The Meaning of Space* and 4.2 *The Meaning of Place* aims to analyze the literature based upon the questions posed according to the method of structured focused comparison. As a reminder to the reader, the questions posed according to the method were the following:

- Based upon the literature; How can the two parties' meanings of space be interpreted with the help of the humanistic geographical concept of space? How do these meanings clash?
- Based upon the literature; How can the two parties' meanings of place be interpreted with the help of the humanistic geographical concept of place? How do these meanings clash?

This will help us to answer the first thesis question, namely: In what ways can humanistic geographical concepts of place and space be used in order to explain the conflict between the Dongria Kondh and Vedanta Resources?

Secondly, after having analyzed the literature with the first of the thesis questions in mind, part 4.3 *The Bigger Perspective: Capitalism and Indigenous Placeboundness* will consist of a broader discussion based upon the results of the analysis of the case study. This discussion will bring in other examples of where indigenous communities have found themselves in conflicting situations with projects of economic development. This broader part of the analysis strives to answer the second of the thesis questions, namely: What are the consequences of modern capitalism on indigenous placeboundness?

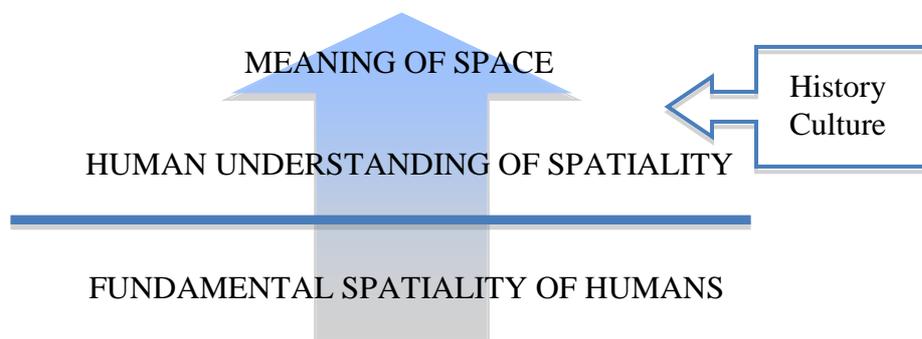
### 4.1. The meaning of space

How do humans interpret space? Tuan (not unlike Heidegger reasoning that humans make sense of themselves through 'being-in-the-world') argues that humans are constantly, and unconsciously, sorting the space around them: “The human being, by his mere presence, imposes a schema on space” (Tuan, 1977, p. 36). The universal claim of the human meaning of space would thus be that *humans themselves create their meaning of space*. The most foundational way of sorting space is performed through the experience of the self within the human body. The way the body is shaped – an upright being, gazing forward on space with four possible direction to go (front,

back, left, right) – affects the way we see and experience our surroundings (Tuan, 1977, p. 36, 45.) The sorting of space is unconscious until the moment we get lost. When we walk in a familiar landscape, we are aware of our own location in relation to the surrounding space. But when we get lost, we lose sense of our bodies: it is no longer evident where forward leads us (Tuan, 1977, p. 36, 45). We then find ourselves floating in nothingness, and anxiety steps in (Heidegger, 1929). Since space is fundamentally determined by the human body, it is anthropocentric by nature (Tuan, 1977, p. 36, 45): “Body is “lived body” and space is humanly constructed space” (Tuan, 1977, p. 35).

Anyhow, it is important here to make a distinction concerning the universal attributes of human spatiality. Human spatiality is on the one hand worldly (Peet, 1998, p. 61) as all humans are experiencing and ordering space. As Pickles argue, the fundamental spatiality of human beings determines the human understanding of spatiality (Pickles, in Peet, 1998, p. 61). However, exactly *how* we experience space can depend on other factors. For instance, Tuan claim that a people’s historical experience and culture to some extent also determines the experience - and thus the meaning - of space (Tuan, 1977, p. 56).

*Figure 4.1. How humans make sense of space as explained by Pickles and Tuan.*



#### *4.1.1. Interpreting Vedanta Resources’ meaning of space*

(Source: Author).

Is it possible to interpret the meaning of space to a multinational company such as Vedanta Resources? Let us try by viewing the company as a whole: What is the company? It is, as earlier mentioned, “India’s largest non-ferrous metals and mining company based on revenues” (Vedanta Resources, 2011a), a multinational corporation with their basis in London. As all companies, they strive to maximize the revenues, and thus the profit, of their businesses. Or, as Vedanta Resources themselves say: “Our strategic goal is to create a world-class metals and mining company and to generate strong financial returns” (Vedanta Resources, 2011b). Hence, it would be quite uncontroversial to claim that the company is also dominated by a

higher ideological or cultural reasoning, that is, the ideology or culture of modern western liberal capitalism.

Space is often, in the West as well as in 'the rest', seen as a good or a resource (Tuan, 1977, p. 58). Furthermore, "[s]pace is a common symbol of freedom in the Western world. Space lies open; it suggests the future and invites action" (Tuan, 1977, p. 54). This kind of view upon space - as a good or a resource - can be interpreted from what Vedanta Resources states about Orissa and their future project in the Niyamgiri Hills:

"The land is rich, accumulating natural and mineral resources over time. /.../ the state [Orissa] is ranked as one of the 10 least developed states of the country. However, it can achieve growth and development by exploring latent avenues available within the state. /.../ Its vast bank of mineral resources holds much promise and the ability to bring the much needed economic development required by the state. The estimated reserves of Bauxite in India are approximately 2.9 billion tonnes and Orissa alone has over 50% of India's Bauxite Reserves. Some of these resources are located in Orissa's most rural districts which now stand to gain from the progress" (Vedanta Resources, 2011d).

Here, the space of the Niyamgiri Hills is looked upon as a land waiting to be exploited in order to generate economic growth and development to India's poorer regions. Vedanta Resources uses a particular choice of words, as they describe the hills as a 'vast bank' containing 'reserves' of bauxite that are 'rich' since they have 'accumulated over time'. Clearly, the outsider spatial perspective is evident here: Vedanta Resources gazes upon the Niyamgiri Hills and sees an endless sea of possibilities, a bank where resources are waiting to be invested in. Following this line of reasoning, it appears as sheer dumbness not to mine the Niyamgiri Hills.

Furthermore, Vedanta Resources' strategic goals can also be fruitfully analyzed with the help of Tuan's phenomenology of space. On Vedanta Resources' website, the company states: "By selecting the opportunities for growth and acquisition carefully and leveraging our skills and experience, we seek to continue to expand our business" (Vedanta Resources, 2011f). Financial growth demands expansion on a geographical scale as well. In order to create growth, new markets, resources and products need to be created. Tuan claims that the striving to attain more space is closely connected to a sort of power manifestation which is often performed in an aggressive way. This implies, for instance, the exploitation and colonialization of land (Tuan, 1977, p. 58).

In this, Tuan makes no difference between the aggressive individual and the aggressive group, nation or company. All strive to attain more space in order to enjoy the contentment of controlling space: in both cases, the conquering of space is one of the highest manifestations of power (Tuan, 1977, p. 58). According to Tuan, this claim for more space can escalate into what almost seems like greed: it has no limits and is impossible to saturate (ibid). Tuan does not draw a parallel between the insatiable need to control

more space and capitalism, although he admits that in Western societies “entrepreneurial spirit have been and are much stronger” (Tuan, 1977, p. 57), which has made western countries and companies more prone on traveling overseas in their search for more space and more power. When putting it this way, the view upon space as a bank of resources that promises freedom and invites the agent to take action is combined with a striving to attain more space as a general manifestation of power.

#### 4.1.2. *Interpreting Dongria Kondh’s meaning of space*

Does the Dongria Kondh meaning of space differ from that of Vedanta Resources? As earlier mentioned, theories on the meaning of space and place seem to have the universal claim that humans sort space as they experience it. However, as mentioned before, factors such as historical experience and culture can affect *how* people experience space, and thus, what meaning space gets. A forest, for instance, can be seen as “a cluttered environment, the antithesis of open space” (Tuan, 1977, p. 56). On the other hand, for the farmer within the forest, the farm becomes the familiar place and the forest around is seen as space, hence a “trackless region of possibility” (ibid).

In the Amnesty International Report, one Dongria Kondh man said to Amnesty International: “The mining will affect the forests, which provide us with all the wood we need and the forest produce we collectively rely on. We plant at various parts of the hills. How will the mining affect our crops? This is how we sustain ourselves and earn our livelihoods” (Amnesty International, 2010, p. 23). Also, as earlier quoted in the background chapter of this study, one elderly woman said: “We are poor, but /.../ we get everything we need from the Hills, it gives us everything but salt” (Amnesty International, 2010, p. 23).

Overall, the Amnesty International noted that in the Dongria Kondh villages, “[m]any people that Amnesty International spoke to referred to the Hills as “life” or “the source of their lives” “(Amnesty International, 2010, p. 20). Within the literature quoting the Dongria Kondh, it is possible to interpret the meaning of space as a similar to the one of Vedanta Resources, namely as an open space, filled with resources and possibilities. However, comparing these quotes with how Vedanta Resources' view upon the hills is interpreted, we can see that *the space includes different resources that are valuable to the two conflicting parties in different ways*. The Dongria Kondh seems to see the forest itself as an endless source of possibilities, as their whole livelihood depends on it. Conversely, Vedanta Resources seem to see the bauxite underneath the forest as the only valuable resource in the area.

### 4.1.3. Clashing meanings of space

Returning to the example with the forest - which can be seen as what Tuan described as “a cluttered environment, the antithesis of open space” (Tuan, 1977, p. 56), or as the total opposite, namely an endless sea of possibilities - this controversy is also evident in how the two parties express themselves about the area. Vedanta Resources highlights the need for economic development in the area, and claims that their investments are a necessary part of making the local peoples' lives more livable:

"According to the planning authorities, agriculture alone cannot provide the development and employment opportunities that are needed to raise the standards of living of the district, and they have identified industrialization and mining as opportunities for the socio-economic development of the region" (Vedanta Resources, 2011d).

On the other hand, as it is also shown later in this analysis, the literature quoting the Dongria Kondh seem to imply a great deal of contentment over their own current way of life, as well as a pride in being self-sufficient thanks to the surrounding forests (Baviskar et al., 2010, p. 30-31; Amnesty International, 2010, p. 23-24). Here, the clashing meanings of space are evident as the space of the Niyamgiri Hills can be seen as something that brings possibilities to humans in its contemporary form, or something that needs to be changed in order to bring possibilities to humans.

As mentioned before, the Dongria Kondh sees the Niyamgiri Hills as owned collectively by all Dongria Kondh's and all other Adivasi groups in the area (Amnesty International, 2010, p. 23). Tuan points out that “[w]hen people work together for a common cause, one man does not deprive the other of space” (Tuan, 1977, p. 64). However, “[c]onflicting activities generate a sense of crowding” (ibid). In the case of the Niyamgiri Hills, it is especially the conflicting activities that seem to be the biggest problem to the Dongria Kondh. A Dongria Kondh man, called J. M. by the Amnesty International, said during their interview sessions: “The transport arrangements will create their own problems. We are also worried about the noise and the dust from the mining and vehicles that they will use” (Amnesty International, 2010, p. 24). Another man said that: “The hill is our god and the earth our goddess. Between the two, we have the rains and water. Those wanting to mine here will slowly take over all this. Where will we go then?” (Amnesty International, 2010, p. 19). An old woman, called K.M, commented on the decision by Vedanta Resources to build the refinery upon a part of common village land that had previously been used as a cemetery: “Where will they put me to rest when I die? Perhaps you can ask the company to bury me under their chimney. It should be able to do this much as it has deceived us and pushed us to part with our land” (Amnesty International, 2010, p. 42). The statements can be said to indicate how these Dongria Kondh people experience the *crowding* of having Vedanta Resources within their space.

Tuan explains the notion of crowding by taking the example of a shy piano player. Alone in a room, the piano player is at peace, enjoying his own

playing. However, if someone steps into the room - especially if it is a dominant person - the piano player is by once uncomfortable: "From being the sole subject in command over space, the pianist, under the gaze of another, becomes one object among many in the room. He senses a loss of power to order things in space from his unique perspective" (Tuan, 1977, p. 59). In the case of the Dongria Kondh and Vedanta Resources, it seems as if a struggle for power has arisen in the clash of the different meanings of space. As Tuan expresses it: "Space is a resource that yields wealth and power when properly exploited. /.../ The "big man" occupies and has access to more space than lesser beings" (Tuan, 1977, p. 58).

As different people hold different meanings of space and power struggles over the usage and control over space often occur, it is not impossible to assume that hegemonies within the meanings of space can be shaped and reshaped. Hereby, the conflicting meanings of space imply something more. In the conflict between the Dongria Kondh and Vedanta Resources it is the one meaning of space that conquers the other that will shape the landscape in the future. If we were to remind ourselves about the principle of Creative Destruction of capitalism, where capitalism needs to bring down old socioeconomic systems in order to establish new markets, it is easy to see why the proposed mine at Niyamgiri Hills poses a threat to the Dongria Kondh. The view upon space as held by Vedanta Resources challenges the physical surroundings and therefore, the entire living space of the Dongria Kondh.

## 4.2. The Meaning of Place

Place, as mentioned before, can be defined as the "center of meaning or a focus of human emotional attachment" (Entrikin, 1976; in Peet, 1998, p. 35). While space represents an outsider's view upon the landscape - a gazing view, often loaded with a sense of freedom and possibility - place represents an insider's view, as it is the centre of human activity, cultural identity and attachment. How the individual experiences place varies. On the one hand, place can be experienced as a safe haven, but on the other hand, it can also be experienced as 'too small' and lacking the individuals experienced need for freedom. Whither we tend to look upon our 'place' with love and nostalgia or with cynical and bitter eyes, most people defend their heartland when outsiders criticize it (Tuan, 1977, 140-160).

Tuan claims that the "profound attachment to the homeland appears to be a worldwide phenomenon. It is not limited to any particular culture and economy" (Tuan, 1977, p. 154). Attachment to place is thus something that all humans practice. In the same way as Husserl argues that we give meaning to objects through intentionality (Crang, 1998, p. 108, 72), we also give meaning to place and homeland. As Tuan claim, the strength of the "[a]ttachment to the homeland /.../ varies among different cultures and historical periods. The more ties there are, the stronger is the emotional bond" (Tuan, 1997, p. 158). These emotional ties towards place are formed

by foundational human phenomena such as religion, livelihood, cultural identity and history.

#### *4.2.1. Interpreting Vedanta Resources' Meaning of Place*

The nature of the concept of place makes it hard to explore the meaning of place to Vedanta Resources, as the company is a stranger to the Niyamgiri Hills. Vedanta Resources are outsiders when they observe the Niyamgiri Hills, and can thus be claimed to have a spatial view upon it rather than a 'placial'. The spatial perspective, according to Tuan, "has the effect of putting a distance between the self and object. What we see is always "out there"" (Tuan, 1977, p. 146). The phenomenology of place for the outside observer thus becomes an unemotional one which is not tied to the place by bonds of emotional attachment, cultural identity and history.

As Tuan says it, "[e]nclosed and humanized space is place" (Tuan, 1977, p. 54). In the case of relation to the Niyamgiri Hills, the hills represent place to the Dongria Kondh and space to Vedanta Resources. Since interpretations of Vedanta Resources' view upon space in the literature has already been elaborated with in part 3.1. *Space and clashing meanings of space*, the analysis will instead focus on interpreting the meaning of place to the Dongria Kondh as it is presented in the literature.

#### *4.2.2. Interpreting Dongria Kondh's Meaning of Place*

To the Dongria Kondh, the Niyamgiri Hills seem to be at the very centre of their cultural identity. Amnesty International quotes an elderly Dongria Kondh woman saying: "If there were no Dongria Kondh left in the hills, we wouldn't be Dongria any more as our culture and identity revolve around the mountain." Another woman claimed that: "Our songs, dances, traditions are all linked to the Niyamgiri Hills. As people leave the Hills, we slowly lose our culture"" (Amnesty International, 2010, p. 20). The statements indicate a strong relationship to the mountains, as if the women are experiencing that the very existence of the Dongria Kondh is defined by the mountains. This connects to what was earlier mentioned, when Amnesty International claimed that "[m]any people that Amnesty International spoke to referred to the Hills as "life" or "the source of their lives" "(Amnesty International, 2010, p. 20). Amnesty International's argumentation is further supported within the report from the fact-finding committee sent out by the Indian Ministry of Environments & Forests. The committee states that: "All Dongria Kondh that the Committee spoke to expressed their strong attachment to the Niyamgiri hills, their stewardship of the land, and the legitimacy of their rights arising from their long-standing presence in these hills" (Baviskar et al., 2010, p. 33).

Tuan brings up three different factors that can define the placeboundness of communities (Tuan, 1977, p. 140-160), and the statements quoted above

also evolve around the very same three themes. First of all, the statements highlight the long-standing *permanent presence* of the Dongria Kondh in the Niyamgiri Hills. Secondly, the *emotional attachment* to the land, and thirdly, the Dongria Kondh's *livelihood* as closely connected to the land.

As for the notion of *permanent presence*, the permanence at which the Dongria Kondh has inhabited the hills is very significant as the tribe is an indigenous tribe. Amnesty International quotes S.M., a Dongria Kondh female leader: "We have lived in these hills for so many years that we cannot count them and tell you how long we have been here" (Amnesty International, 2010, p. 19). According to Tuan, the notion of permanence is an important factor as we speak about the meaning of place (Tuan, 1997, p. 140). This is especially since place can be seen a bearer of history. For the indigenous, the landscape "is personal and tribal history made visible. /.../" (Tuan, 1977, p. 157-158), as the indigenous individual can recollect the whole history of his or her community within one specific geographical area (ibid). The landscape thus inhabits a defining character of the individual and his/her community, as it inhabits and materializes ancient tribal history.

Concerning the *emotional attachment* of the Dongria Kondh, it can be argued that the ties of the Dongria Kondh to their native land are deepened through the nature of their religion. Short claims that animists "are more comfortable with their whole environmental context than worshippers of sky gods, who have abandoned sacred associations with trees, rocks and rivers" (Short, 1991 in Atkins et. al., 1998, 239). Further more, as Tuan says, [r]eligion could either bind a people to place or free them from it. The worship of local gods binds a people to place whereas universal religions give freedom. In a universal religion /.../ no locality is necessarily more sacred than another" (Tuan, 1977, p. 152). In the case of the Dongria Kondh, their religion is tightly bound to their place, as the supreme gods of Niyam Raja Penu and Dharani Mata are believed to dwell in the Niyamgiri Hills. One Dongria Kondh woman said to Amnesty International: "He [Niyam Raja Penu] brings us everything as a people; he blesses us and makes us who we are as a people." (Amnesty International, 2010, p. 20). Baviskar et al. points out that it is the very hills, rivers and their surrounding forests that are considered to be gods that have protected the Dongria Kondh through all times (Baviskar et al., 2010, p. 25). Therefore, the physical landscape becomes holy in itself. One Dongria Kondh villager said to the fact finding committee working on behalf of the Indian Ministry of Environment & Forests: "As long as the mountain is alive, we will not die" (ibid.). The religious attachment to the mountains is also visible in the arts and architecture of the Dongria Kondh, as triangular shaped representing the mountains occur in for instance wall paintings and weavings in the villages (Baviskar et al., 2010, p. 25).

As for the notion of *livelihood*, Baviskar et al. concludes that The Dongria Kondh's "belief in the sacredness of the hills is rooted in a strong dependence on the natural resources that the mountains provide" (Baviskar et al., 2010, p. 26). Baviskar et al. experienced that the Dongria Kondh took great pride

in the fact that they could live self-sufficiently on what the Niyamgiri Hills gave them: “Notably, no one in the village has ever worked for wages. The Dongria Kondh we met were proud of their economic independence and freedom from want. Over and over again, they attributed their well-being and contentment to the Niyamgiri hills and their bounty” (Baviskar et al., 2010, p. 30-31). Humans often experience their homeland – their place, centering the activities of their daily lives – as the centre of the world (Tuan, 1977, p. 147). Within the case of the Dongria Kondh in the Niyamgiri Hills, the place appears to entail a mutually reinforcing triangle of livelihood, religion and cultural identity to the Dongria Kondh that centers the activities of the Dongria Kondh and that defines them as a people.

Furthermore, Baviskar et al. claim that the Dongria Kondh expressed contentment over their present lifestyle, and showed "opposition to any destructive change of the ecology threatening their culture" (Baviskar et al., 2010, p. 33-34). This is also something that Amnesty International highlights. One Dongria Kondh man said to Amnesty International: “We have seen what mining does to the land and we do not want that to happen here” (Amnesty International, 2010, p. 23). A woman said: “People who come from outside follow a caste system, we don’t have it or want it” (Amnesty International, 2010, p. 24). Another woman was very concerned over the risk for increased sexual harassments of Dongria Kondh women if the mining process would be allowed to proceed (ibid). Tuan describes contentment of ones homeland as a “warm positive feeling” (Tuan, 1977, p. 159), but claim that contentment is often interpreted as a general incuriosity towards the surrounding world (ibid). However, the statements quoted above indicate an awareness of how the outside world functions and the possible results stemming from the proposed mining project. The choice of an economically independent, self-sustaining lifestyle without ‘developmental help’ from outsiders can therefore be interpreted as informed and rational.

#### *4.2.3. Space vs. Place*

In part 4.1. *The meaning of space*, it became evident that the conflict between the Dongria Kondh and Vedanta Resources could be interpreted as a conflict between clashing meanings of space. However, perhaps it is more relevant to talk about a conflict between 'placial' and spatial views upon the Niyamgiri Hills. As Germundsson says, the concepts of space and place can be fundamentally described as two different ways to look at the landscape: from above or at the spot (Germundsson, 2011). As indicated in the introduction of this study, space and place signifies an outsider-versus-insider relationship. Here, the spatial view becomes dominated by an unemotional view upon the space arguing for the importance of economic growth and development, whilst the view favoring place is rather dominated by highly emotional ties of culture, identity, history and tradition (ibid).

In the case study, the bottom-up perspective of the Dongria Kondh includes a significantly strong placeboundness that is rooted in the fact that the Dongria Kondh is an indigenous people with deep religious, cultural and historical ties to the place. When phenomenological writers talk about the *genius loci* - the unique spirit of a place that its users experience - this *genius loci* defines the core of the cultural identity and the religion of the Dongria Kondh. The mountains, river and woods are given an intentionality, or meaning, that makes these the centre of the world for the Dongria Kondh. The place of the Niyamgiri Hills thus becomes what Heidegger calls the centre of care to the Dongria Kondh: that is, the centre from where the people base their general knowledge upon, and more importantly, the place that forms the centre of the indigenous community's definition of itself as a people through 'being-in-the-world' (Crang, 1998, p. 109-110). This notion finds support in the many quotes of the Dongria Kondhs that highlight the defining character that the Niyamgiri Hills has on the existence of the Dongria Kondh as a people.

The spatial, top-down perspective of space of Vedanta Resources can be interpreted as largely determined by the company's characteristics of being a multinational company, whose main goal is to generate economic growth and profit. The company uses an argumentation that highlights the importance of economic development in the state of Orissa and in India as a whole. This kind of economic development argued in favor for can be said to bring with it a set of cultural norms and a preferred way of living life that challenges the existing cultural identity, livelihood and religion of the Dongria Kondh.

As stated earlier, many Dongria Kondhs expressed pride in being self-reliant, and Baviskar et al. claimed that no one in the villages they visited had ever worked for wages. Vedanta Resources on the other hand, argues that "[i]n the process of industrialisation, the district will stand to gain from infrastructure development including power, access to primary education, quality healthcare services, employment generation, diversification of the agrarian economy, thus accelerating the process of economic development" (Vedanta Resources, 2011d). Despite the fact that India's indigenous population seldom have been properly compensated for having their livelihoods destroyed in projects of economic development, nor belongs to the groups of society that historically has gotten a share from economic development projects in India, this still creates an ethical dilemma: On the one hand, is it possible (or even preferable) to argue against economic development? On the other hand, why does economic development have to include the characteristics of Creative Destruction, which exploits people and extinguishes all alternative ways of living life?

### 4.3. The Bigger Perspective: Capitalism and Indigenous Placeboundness

The second thesis question of this study was: What are the consequences of capitalism on indigenous placeboundness? As it has been shown throughout this analysis, the meaning of place as presented in the literature about the Dongria Kondh highlights the importance of place to the Dongria Kondh. The indigenous land of the Niyamgiri Hills affect a wide range of societal phenomena within the Dongria Kondh's society as their cultural identity, religion and livelihood are defined by the place. Hence, the result of the close ties towards the Niyamgiri Hills creates a very specific *placeboundness* which is largely determined by the fact that the Dongria Kondhs are an indigenous tribe. This goes very much hand in hand with Heidegger's theory of that human beings make sense of themselves and their surroundings by 'being-in-the-world' (Crang, 1998.p.109; Heidegger, 1929). In the case of the Dongria Kondh, the literature paints a picture of a tribe that is defined as a people by their place. This place forms not only the center of their daily activities (which according to Heidegger is where the human center of care lays, and thus the basis of our general knowledge about ourselves and the surrounding world (ibid)), but also the abode of their Gods and the materialized epicenter of their cultural identity. Hence, there is no doubt that there exists such a thing as an indigenous placeboundness within the case of the Dongria Kondh.

Building upon the theoretical framework, we also know that capitalism – and thus also mainstream projects of economic development – carries with it the principle of creative destruction. This creative destruction implies that where the economic system of capitalism is implemented, the system will break down old societal structures in order to create new markets, new products and new consumers. In the case study, it became evident that the conflict between Vedanta Resources and the Dongria Kondh was by large a conflict between competing lifestyles. Vedanta Resources proclaim the need for economic development that could bring a higher material life standard to some inhabitants. Whither the tribal communities will get a share of this is uncertain. However, it is hard to argue against the need for poverty reduction in Orissa. The Dongria Kondh argue against the lifestyle that would follow the mining project, seem content with their current way of life (which, it should be noted, have shown no problems providing them with their daily bread for centuries) and take pride in the fact that they are self-reliant. If the proposed mining project would be allowed to start, the effects on the society of the Dongria Kondh would go hand in hand with the principles of creative destruction. As the cultural identity, religion and livelihood of the Dongria Kondh are all so closely connected to their ancient lands, the very core of all that defines the Dongria Kondh as a people would be excavated. Building upon this example, capitalism can thus be said to pose an inherent threat to the traditional lifestyles, livelihoods, cultural identities and religions of indigenous peoples.

In fact, the dilemma between capitalist investment and economic development projects on the one hand, and indigenous cultural identity and lifestyle on the other hand, has become evident in indigenous communities in many parts of the world. Greenland, for instance, needs to develop new industries in order to be economically independent from its former colonizer Denmark. On Greenland, natural resources such as minerals, gas, oil as well as potentials for hydroelectric power can be found (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Denmark, 2011). However, resource extraction on Greenland would result in substantially higher CO<sub>2</sub> emissions from Greenland (IWGIA, 2010, p. 21). Today, "the impact of global warming and climate change is a major issue for the country" (ibid), as the melting of the ices result in lesser possibilities to hunt and fish according to traditional techniques. Also, IWGIA writes that:

"[T]he Government of Greenland is negotiating with one of the aluminium production industry giants, Alcoa Inc. The company has been planning to build an aluminium smelter in the area of Maniitsoq in West Greenland for several years. /.../ Hydropower is to be used for the plant and so two big lakes will be dammed, thereby /.../ flooding and losing endless archaeological and historical sites, and radically and irreversibly changing an inland area traditionally used for summer hunting. Several organizations in Greenland are concerned about this development, and the wish is that orderly public hearings are held not just on the economic aspects of welcoming an aluminium smelting plant but also aspects of protecting Greenland's tangible and intangible cultural heritage" (IWGIA, 2010, p. 22-23).

Here, Greenland's self-rule government is facing a dilemma. Greenland can sacrifice some of the traditional indigenous culture and livelihood in order to generate an economic development that could provide Greenland with a higher degree of independence. Greenland could also avoid the risk of excavating the cultural heritage and traditional livelihood, but would then remain occupied with social problems of for instance unemployment, and continue to be depending on Danish subsidies to the State Budget (IWGIA, 2010, p. 18).

On the other side of the world, in Brazil, paradoxes also occur between the indigenous community and projects of economic development. President Luis Inácio Lula da Silva has launched a growth acceleration plan, where "44 % of the hydro-electric power that is being planned by the government will be on Indigenous Lands. There are 83 hydro-electric plants in operation and another 247 planned for Amazonia, which could affect 44,000 people" (IWGIA, 2010, p. 211). In this case, the indigenous peoples' possibilities to choose (as in the case of Greenland, which has a self-rule government and where the majority of the population is Inuit Greenlanders (IWGIA, 2010, p. 18)) are non-existent.

However, the examples show a similarity with the case of the Dongria Kondh and Vedanta Resources, namely that the economic development

projects involved are inherently competing against the traditional livelihood, cultural identity and religion of indigenous peoples. The reason for this is that as capitalism brings with it the principle of creative destruction to places, and these places – indigenous people's lands - are also the basis for indigenous lifestyles. Also, it should be noted that capitalism and economic development are not value- or culture neutral. They bring with themselves a set of cultural values and lifestyle proposals that need to be followed in order for the market to be able to exist. People need to work for salaries, produce products and buy products in stores in order for markets to exist. Hence, it is possible to claim that we once again render at what Esteva said in the beginning of this paper, that the notion of economic development today is “robbing peoples of different cultures of the opportunity to define the forms of their social life” (Esteva, 2001, p. 9).

It should be highlighted here that what has just been said is not a dismissal of the current economic system. Rather, it is an aim to shed a light on the fact that the economic system of today shows a great inflexibility towards alternative ways of living life, as it works to mainstream the places and lifestyles of the world. Despite different degrees of self-determination, indigenous peoples are either forced (sometimes violently) into devastation of their ancient lands, cultural identity, religion and livelihood; or forced to choose between this and economic development. This is a lack within the system that the world needs to focus on, in order to encourage political incentives that aim to create projects of economic development that are local and just, and who encourage freedom within choice of lifestyle.

## 5. Conclusions

In order to answer the first thesis question - In what ways can humanistic geographical concepts of place and space be used in order to explain the conflict between the Dongria Kondh and Vedanta Resources? – the humanistic geographical concepts of the phenomenology of place and space has throughout the analysis shown a capacity to provide us with a deeper understanding of the human relation to place and space within the discussion about the conflict between the Dongria Kondh and Vedanta Resources.

First of all, the concepts give us a tool to look upon the relationship between the Dongria Kondh and the Niyamgiri Hills from a perspective of the universal human. For instance, as Tuan was quoted earlier in this study: "Profound attachment to the homeland appears to be a worldwide phenomena. It is not limited to any particular culture and economy" (Tuan, 1977, p. 154). Livelihood, permanence and emotional attachment through for instance religion, history and culture where highlighted as determining factors of how humans experience and bring meaning to place through what Heidegger calls 'being-in-the-world' (Crang, 1998.p.109; Heidegger, 1929). The Dongria Kondh's view upon the Niyamgiri Hills that can be interpreted within the literature as dominated by a 'placial' view. Their intentionality

towards the space is colored by their strong relationship to the place, which is largely determined by the fact that the tribe is an indigenous tribe and thus have a long-standing permanence at the Niyamgiri Hills. By looking at the phenomenology of place and space we can avoid exoticist analyses of indigenous peoples' relationship to their land, and instead focus on how humans in general connect to and experience their surroundings through intentionality.

Secondly, it turned out to be impossible or at least very far-fetched, to analyze the meaning of place to Vedanta Resources, as the company is not a natural social group and since it is an outsider at the place of the Niyamgiri Hills. This is not necessarily a problem. Rather, it points to the direction of one of the main conclusions of this study, namely that the conflict is by large a conflict between insiders and outsiders, between spatial and 'placial' perspectives or meanings given to the Niyamgiri Hills. The literature suggests that whilst Vedanta Resources largely sees the hills from a distant perspective and as a bank of resources waiting to be exploited, the Dongria Kondhs see the area in a holistic way. The literature suggests that the Niyamgiri Hills are experienced by the Dongria Kondh as both space (the source of their livelihood) and place (a container of religion, culture, history and the activities of daily life). Speaking in terms of the humanistic geographical concepts of place and space, the conflict is both a conflict between differing spatial perspectives (as the two agents have different views upon what kind of resources that are valuable in the mountains), as well as a conflict between the perspective of place versus the perspective of space. In order to translate this into the language of phenomenology, the intentionality which is given to the place and space that forms the Niyamgiri Hills is varying enormously between the two conflicting parties. These separated views upon the Niyamgiri Hills form the very core of the conflict.

Thirdly, the conflict also appears to be a conflict between the different lifestyles that the future could hold. Within the literature, Vedanta Resources advocates a capitalist lifestyle that would follow the mining of the Niyamgiri Hills: A lifestyle where people work for a salary and buy produce in order to survive, a lifestyle where economy is prioritized in front of culture and religion. On the other hand, the Dongria Kondh defends their own lifestyle, as they seem to have come to the conclusion that their contemporary lifestyle is the preferable one. These cultural values and meanings of the two conflicting parties reflect how they experience the space and place of the Niyamgiri Hills. As we could see throughout the analysis, the conflict seems to evolve around a power struggle over meanings of space and place, where the winner decides the future meaning of the Niyamgiri Hills. This creates what Tuan describes as crowding; a feeling among the Dongria Kondh that their space is being occupied by a party whose activities are conflicting to their own. This could also be explained by the fact that there is a clash between the insiders and the outsiders. While Vedanta Resources has an intentionality of space - where the focus lies upon the extraction of resources, and where the attaining of space is a symbol of power - the Dongria Kondh primarily sees their place.

The ties towards the space is as earlier mentioned strengthened by the specific nature of the Dongria Kondh's longstanding permanence at the place, the complete dependence upon the mountains for their livelihood, and the emotional attachment towards the place due to their culture, history and religious views. All in all, the literature describes the place as the very defining factor of the Dongria Kondh as a people.

Building upon this, we can give a more clear-cut answer to the first thesis question: The humanistic geographical concepts of place and space can be used in order to explain the conflict between the Dongria Kondh and Vedanta Resources as it provides us with a deeper understanding for dichotomy between the views of the two conflicting parties. This dichotomy forms the very core of the conflict: The conflict is a conflict over lifestyles, a conflict between insiders and outsiders, and a conflict over power between majority and minority.

This leads us to the second thesis question, namely: What are the consequences of modern capitalism on indigenous placeboundness? This is a very general question that is hard to answer without over-simplifying the matter. However, what has been shown in the case study, and what is also evident in the other cases brought up in part 4.3. The Bigger Perspective: Capitalism and Indigenous Communities, is that the principle of creative destruction is very much a reality when speaking about the effects of capitalism on indigenous communities. Being minorities, indigenous communities are continuously forced to give up their cultural identities, religious bonds to the land as well as the maintenance of their traditional livelihood in order to make way for projects of economic development that they cannot be sure to get their share of. Ironically speaking, in the 'best' of cases such as in Greenland, the indigenous communities are forced to *choose* between their cultural heritage, religious bonds to the land as well as the maintenance of their traditional livelihood on the one hand and economic development on the other hand.

In a world where economic development is often seen as the primary solution to world poverty, this can be seen as a highly problematic moral dilemma. On the one hand, economic development can offer a nice lifestyle with a higher material life standard to the majority, as well as a higher freedom of choice to the individual. On the other hand, other lifestyles are being sacrificed under what almost appears to be a form of market dictatorship over lifestyles, and indigenous community lifestyles seem to be especially exposed. This is a dilemma we need to be aware of in order to work for a more just and humane world order. Hopefully, by creating awareness and deeper understanding about the controversies built into capitalist economies such as the dichotomy between the principle of creative destruction and the lifestyles of indigenous communities, greater power will be given to political incentives who work to create policies that encourage strategies of for instance locally governed economic development and development with a greater respect to cultural identities.

## 6. Summary

This literature case study focused on a contemporary conflict between the mining company Vedanta Resources and the indigenous tribe of the Dongria Kondh within the Niyamgiri Hills in Orissa, India. The analysis was grounded in phenomenology, as humanistic geographical concepts of space and place were used in order to interpret the different meanings of space and place as they were expressed within the literature by the two conflicting parties. The analysis showed a discrepancy between the two parties' views of space and place, as well as an insider – outsider complex of problems. Building on this, the study developed into a discussion about the nature of capitalism and its effects on indigenous communities. Based upon the analysis, the study argued that indigenous communities and cultural identities are especially placebound due to factors such as permanence, cultural identity, religion and livelihood. Taking for granted Schumpeter's observations about capitalism's built in principle of Creative Destruction, the study further concluded that capitalism is inherently hostile against indigenous traditional lifestyles and cultural identities. Last but not least, the study highlighted the importance of political awareness concerning the effects of capitalism on traditional indigenous lifestyles and the cultural identities of minorities, and called for greater power being delegated to political incentives who encourage projects of economic development that are local and just, and freedom within the choice of lifestyle.

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