Queering Resistance, *Queering* Research: In Search of a Queer Decolonial Feminist Understanding of Adivasi Indigeneity[1]

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Abstract

In this paper, I place both the methodological and epistemological realms of my doctoral research with the Adivasis (indigenous peoples) of Attappady, Kerala under a queer decolonial feminist lens in order to better understand the nature of contemporary Adivasi indigeneity, and indigenous resistance. Given Kerala's unique position within India as a communist state, often acting in the interest of global capitalism by implementing neoliberal polices and steering state-led development plans, its Adivasis are already queer in their relationship to the state as "non-modern others". In order to understand the often contradictory and complex relationship of the Adivasi with the communist-neoliberal state, beyond being the "marginal other", I mobilize a queer decolonial feminist framework, through a process I term queering. I use queering to critically examine and analyze contemporary indigeneity and indigenous resistance in two stages. Firstly, through

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a broad analysis of the coloniality of development and its material effects on Adivasi lands resulting in land struggles. Secondly, through a narrower focus on gender and sexuality to show how queering is also useful in understanding the operation of particular modalities of power. In doing so, I argue that queering reveals the latent structural complexities of Adivasi indigeneity by drawing causal links between systematic processes of land loss and land alienation, material livelihood, and structural changes in various domains, including gender, sexuality, spirituality and health. I also argue that emergent and existing modalities of Adivasi resistance, despite the forms they take, are in fact epistemological and ontological acts of decolonial resistance against the combined coloniality of capitalism, development and modernity on their ancestral lands.

I. Introduction: The Problem of Unqueered Adivasi Materiality

India's particularly complex socio-cultural history, its multiple diversities, and its experience of European colonialisms has had temporally and spatially diverse impacts on its Adivasi (indigenous) populations. Both the British colonial state and the postcolonial Indian state have oscillated between policies of assimilation/integration, and those of isolation with regard to the Adivasis. The current postcolonial Indian state, following its predecessors, has instituted several policies to ensure the "parallel development" of Adivasi populations alongside mainstream society, in an effort to recognize and address their socio-cultural and economic differences. State policy is thus aimed at "mainstreaming", i.e., systematically transforming Adivasis from passive state subjects to full citizens. This process of mainstreaming through development policies has had various impacts on Adivasi lives and livelihoods that are best described as being "colonial". Such policies create and sustain conditions of coloniality through state-led and state-supported development planning, as well as their associated capital relations. In an effort to make these multiple conditions of coloniality visible, I employ decolonial lenses colored by queer and feminist theories in an analytical process I term *queering*. *Queering*, in this paper, thus works to expand current understandings of indigeneity in India by showing how the very understanding of difference upon which Adivasi indigeneity is embedded in a deeply colonial and coloniz-

ing power relation. This in turn leads to continuing contestations over indigenous identity and the related notions of land relations and politics.

Following complex patterns of colonial and postcolonial state management of Adivasis, current state policies have a twofold and contradictory goal of integration and isolation. On the one hand, state policies consist of mechanisms of integration aimed at transforming Adivasis into full citizens of the state (via development policies). On the other, they consist of mechanisms of isolation that maintain their subaltern status (via policies of socio-cultural and ecological preservation). *Queering* state policies by critically analyzing their impacts on the ground through a decolonial feminist perspective reveals that these contradictory goals often collide, resulting in development policies creating a state of dependence rather than empowerment, and conservation policies supporting industrial growth rather than socio-ecological preservation. I use the following example to show how *queering* works to expose latent contradictions and connections that, when visible, complicate and enrich present understandings of Adivasi indigeneity.

An article in a leading national newspaper, "'Alcoholic' tag causes hurt to tribal victims", published on August 3, 2013, states that various politicians "blamed young mothers of Attappady for not 'eating properly' and branded them alcoholics, saying their habits led to the death of their children". Infant deaths attributed to severe neonatal and prenatal malnutrition have been rising in Attappady, and reached a particular high in 2015, when all of the leading national newspapers carried several stories on the issue ("Maternal under-nutrition cause of infant deaths in Attappady: study", 2013; Philip, 2014; Rajagopal, 2013a, 2013b; Shaji, 2015; Suchitra, 2014). The Kerala government issued a statement identifying "lack of effective implementation of health packages and malnutrition as the major cause of tribal infant deaths in Attappady" on March 10, 2015 ("Malnutrition major cause of tribal infant deaths: Kerala government", 2015).

The policy solution to these infant deaths thus far has been to increase monetary aid to the effect of 500 crore rupees (roughly US$75 million), according to one estimate, and state services such as food rations and health clinics to ensure the availability of nutrients and healthcare. Despite the increase in these symptomatic solutions little attention

is paid to addressing root causes. Several activists and community leaders reject the narrative of alcoholism among pregnant women, drawing media and state attention instead to the fact that such malnutrition is a direct outcome of the rupture in traditional agricultural practices of the communities.

For instance, on September 22, 2015 in "Death Stalks Attappady Babies", a local Adivasi NGO employee is quoted as saying:

> Long term solutions like restoring the alienated agricultural lands and providing them with basic irrigation still remain on paper. Group farming projects focusing on pulses and millets are yet to be initiated. Short-term measures including providing of nutritious meals are a myth, mainly due to lack of coordination, corruption and sheer indifference of the officials.

This statement identifying land alienation as the root cause of the rise in infant mortality in Attappady evoked much anger and was subsequently dismissed as the ranting of a "Naxalite", or internal terrorist (Rajagopal, 2013b). At first glance, land alienation and dispossession might not seem to have a direct causal link to rising infant mortality. Yet, an analysis at the ontological level reveals the ways in which the ontologies and epistemologies that ground Adivasi land relations are not only misunderstood, but also how their fractured understanding seriously diminishes the political agency of the Adivasi, at the same time creating critical challenges to their very survival. While a surface-level analysis shows how the mismatch between local needs and state solutions indicates the inadequacy of state development policy and planning, *queering* (whose workings I detail in the later sections of this paper) makes the underlying epistemological and ontological rupturing visible, therefore allowing a more nuanced understanding of Adivasi materiality.

The analytical process of *queering* employs a relational understanding of difference to challenge binary conceptions of identity, therefore exposing the relative nature of marginality, borders and boundaries on the one hand, and fundamentally questioning how power comes to be crystallized in certain spaces, on the other. In doing so, it brings together queer theory's critique of normativity and binaries, with decolonial

theory's critique of power from the vantage point of modernity and coloniality. *Queering* is thus situated theoretically within a queer decolonial feminist framework that borrows from queer and feminist theories, indigenous studies (including native studies), and decolonial theory (both produced/enacted by resistance movements/indigenous peoples, and theorizations of decoloniality from within the academy). I employ this tool in order to understand, a) the nature of contemporary indigeneity at the nexus of coloniality and modernity, and b) the politics of contemporary indigeneity along multiple lines of difference by undertaking a critical study of the workings of power and resistance. In the following sections, I show how *queering* does this by combining a decolonial perspective that reveals the coloniality of indigeneity, with a queer feminist perspective that makes visible multiple hierarchies of power and their modalities of operation, while fundamentally questioning the categories of difference used by the state (among other placeholders of power). To do so, I draw from feminist ethnographic research conducted between 2010 and 2016 involving over 85 individual and group narrative interviews of Adivasis, rural settlers, government and NGO employees, and land activists.

In the following section, *Theorizing Queering: Crafting A Queer Decolonial Feminist Framework*, I outline the conceptual basis of the QDF framework by delving into queer, decolonial, and feminist theories, as well as their intersections, showing how this framework can be deployed as an analytical tool in its form as *queering*. In the third section, *A Note On Methodology: Queering And Decolonizing Research,* I describe the methodological basis of my research in an effort to show both its role in *queering,* and contextualize the origins and nature of my research and its particularities. In the fourth section, *Queering Contemporary Adivasi Indigeneities*, I use *queering* to critically examine and analyze contemporary indigeneity and indigenous resistance in two stages. First, through a broad analysis of the coloniality of development and its material effects on Adivasi lands resulting in land struggles, and secondly, through a narrower focus on gender and sexuality to show how *queering* is also useful in understanding the operation of particular modalities of power. In both, I use examples from my recent and ongoing ethnographic research in Attappady. Finally, in the fifth section, *Some Queer Thoughts that Persist,* I offer a brief overview of my analysis, and end with some lingering questions.

II. Theorizing Queering: Crafting a Queer Decolonial Feminist Framework

Decolonial theory offers a dynamic, evolving and ever expanding political space to decolonize feminist, queer and indigenous studies. Being an active destabilizer of structures and enactments of power, decolonial theory enriches and enlivens queer theory, and this coupling is central to imagining and realizing the theory and politics of this paper. In fact, the organic mobility of ideas between the realms of feminist, queer, indigenous, and native studies enriches each of these fields. In the following section, I elaborate one such dialogue between these three dynamic fields by presenting a queer decolonial feminist (QDF) framework which, by being a modality of resistance itself, offers a strong foundation for studying Adivasi resistance. In what follows, I show how *queering* operates by analyzing both the content and process of this research, examining how contemporary Adivasi indigeneity is produced and exists at the nexus of multiple identities, oppressions and liberations through continuing colonial processes. In so doing, *queering* operates within decolonial spaces of resistance that it helps to create. It takes colonialism as one among many structures that produce varying negative impacts on indigenous bodies and beings, while simultaneously recognizing the agency of the indigenous person as a producer of decolonial knowledges and political agency, rather than a complicit, passive, non-citizen frozen within their forest by popular, colonial, statist discourse. It does so by a) exposing the coloniality inherent in constructing indigenous peoples as marginal beings living within marginal spaces, instead positioning them within the center in active decolonial spaces where the constructed *othering* of the indigenous becomes evident, and b) recognizing and affirming indigenous agency, while simultaneously offering a wider, more inclusive framework that recognizes the multiplicity of indigenous experiences, politics, and ideas.

Queer Decolonial Feminism and Queering

Queer theory emerged from the political work of those striving for diversity in, and inclusion of, non-binary genders and sexualities. It has since worked to expand the otherwise heteronormative bounds of femi-

nist movements and theories by productively complicating and challenging ideas and structures of power, including, but not limited to, those related to gender and sexuality. I draw on three ideas here: of difference, margins/boundaries/borders, and power, in order to show how queer theory can be used to contextualize the concept of indigeneity within broader regimes of power (see Chen, 2012 for a skillfully crafted analysis employing queer theory in a different context).

Indigeneity is usually embedded in a regime of power in which indigenous peoples are defined – "legally/analytically (the 'other' definition), practically/strategically (the self-definition), and/or collectively (the global in-group definition)" (Niezen, 2003: 19). While one might already be indigenous by definition, indigeneity is mobilized as a distinct political identity/category by "becoming" indigenous. "Becoming indigenous is always only a *possibility* negotiated within political fields of culture and history" (Cadena and Starn, 2007: 13). Indigeneity is thus often construed as a continuous process whereby "being" indigenous translates into "becoming indigenous" through various practices and performances (Sundberg, 2011) including political participation, resistance, cultural ceremonies, etc. Indigenous politics thus serve as a site of identity-making. But as identity is embedded ontologically in land, indigenous politics are also a site of the decolonization of land, ideas, and identity.

In several state societies, indigenous politics are constructed on the basis of their difference: from the settler in settler colonial contexts, and from state-society in other contexts (of internal colonialism, as in the Indian case). In most of these cases, public and private narratives relating to the indigenous see them as less-than, behind, backward, or primitive, in comparison with the rest of society. Such views become solidified in patronizing state policies that construct the indigene as passive, helpless, hapless, and often as the feminine other. Simon Bignall (2007), in reflecting upon the problematic notion of difference as it is expressed in multicultural, postcolonial societies writes that:

> Difference is reified as the compelling or causal force of critical transformation, but simultaneously treated as the problematic absence, lack or disadvantage that must be eventually resolved or dissolved, as soci-

> ety reconciles its differences and forges unity and equality (in Hickey-Moody and Palins, 2007: 200).

Queer theory offers a way beyond this paradoxical moment in which a negative conception of difference is seen as both the problem and the solution – where politics become organized around erasing such differences (and result in top-down development policies, for instance). In contrast, queer theory harnesses difference as a positive force to construct an affinity politics that fractures hierarchies of exploitative and oppressive power, which recognize some things as "normal" and others as anomalous/abnormal.

While queerness is about being on the margins, or being *outside the center* (Anzaldúa, 1987), by design it also challenges the making of such margins and boundaries along lines of difference. Gloria Anzaldúa (in Moraga and Anzaldúa, 1983) writes that queer groups pose a threat to the operation of power-as-usual by not fitting-in squarely with the world, and that while queer groups are united by their queerness, they are not without internal differences. While marginality may serve as an organizing tool for queer politics, queer theory works to expose marginalization as an intentional, socio-cultural-political process that reflects the inequalities and injustices created by the unevenness of power. By doing so, it fractures spaces where power difference comes to be crystallized (for instance, in race, ethnicity, nationhood, gender and sexuality, Anzaldúa, 1987; Jagose, 1996; Mohanty, 1988) as unchanging self-evident eternal truths, thus making room for resistance and transformation.

Queer theory also shares a political space with feminist theory, drawing heavily from the theory of intersectionality, which examines how gender intersects with different identities to produce different experiences of privilege and oppression (Collins, 2000). While feminist theory questions the operation of power as it relates to the structural operation of gender, it also critically examines places and spaces where power is located and becomes entrenched. It is thus able to scrutinize the structures that govern society at individual and collective levels in an intersectional perspective. A critical feminist theory combining critical race theory with queer theory creates a liberatory politics that envisions marginal spaces as sites of political resistance and transformation. It can

therefore challenge marginality, difference, and the operation of power in the context of indigeneity not only by exposing histories of structural oppression and systematic marginalization, but also by critically examining the body politics of being indigenous (at the individual level, in relation to gender and sexuality for instance; and at the communal level, in relation to indigenous politics and resistance).

Yet, queer theory, even when strengthened by queer of color and feminist critiques, often erases the indigene, politically crippling the indigenous subject by not engaging seriously with coloniality and colonial histories (Smith, 2010: 52–53). To address this problem, it is necessary to critically engage with decolonial theory in conjunction with queer and feminist theories, not only because decolonial theories expose the linkages between coloniality and gender/sexuality (Canfield, 2009; Smith, 2010), but also because their political space can be stretched and complicated by indigeneity. This can be achieved in many ways, for instance, by recognizing "the persistence of Indigenous concepts and epistemologies" (Arvin et al., 2012: 21); engaging with Two-Spiritedness (possessing both male and female spirits, and transcending the male/female binary) to rethink queer studies; and/or questioning whether decolonial struggles and indigenous beings and histories are a part of the intellectual and political consciousness generated by such a perspective (Driskill et al., 2010: 78). Using queer theory thus does not disrupt its intimate politics, but instead bolsters its political potential by analytically challenging, not reinforcing, coloniality in the indigenous context (see Finley in Driskill et al., 2011).

To this end, decolonial theory can be employed to broaden feminist and queer critiques of power by examining how coloniality and modernity operate "as two sides of the same coin" (Grosfoguel, 2007; Quijano, 2000), constructing unequal socio-political-cultural structures that maintain marginality and difference, especially among the indigenous. The project of decolonization, then, is a project of resistance to the conjoined operations of modernity/coloniality and, as such, a negation of the marginality and difference that it coproduces. Concurrently, while decoloniality acts as a resistant, destructive force, it is also a constructive force that rethinks, rewrites and repoliticizes worlds (in plural) by engaging in decolonial meaning-making processes (Mignolo, 2011: 46).

Decolonial theory, therefore, complicates and expands the very definition of history, theory, and truth, in a general sense, by challenging the universalism of occidental history and Eurocentric thinking, and recognizing multiple world-making processes as theory, and by presenting these other theories (ontologies and epistemologies) as equitable, based on a positive, horizontal plane of difference (Alfaisal, 2011; Hokowhitu, 2009; Smith, 2012; Walsh, 2012).

As a perspective that brings together lessons from queer, feminist and decolonial theories, the queer decolonial feminist (QDF) framework allows for a conjoined study of both power and resistance focusing on the most marginal, seeing the place where power is most felt, and therefore containing the greatest possibility of resistance, as the beginning of politics. As radical feminist scholar Cynthia Enloe says, "to study how power operates, we must always start at the bottom and then study up the line of power" (personal conversation, November 2015). Beginning thus, a QDF framework also challenges ways of seeing, knowing and structuring the world normalized by the colonial/modern imperial project, by fundamentally questioning how "western thought" has come to explain and construct a singular world. In other words, through its critiques of epistemic and ontological hierarchies, including those of "asymmetric ignorance" (Chakrabarty, 1992: 2), this framework challenges the very power hierarchies along which the "modern" world has come to be built through colonialism and its associated operatives, hiding within itself the existence of many other worlds. The decolonial project, strengthened by feminist and queer interventions then, is not about border crossing but about shape shifting borders themselves. In such a moment, the indigene becomes visible as an active political agent rather than a passive subject, operating within a shifting, changing space of marginality (or queerness).

Drawing from this framework, I use *queering* as an agentive force to decouple and destabilize normative forms of power and control at the intersection of coloniality and modernity. In other words, I engage in a queer analysis of the project of decolonization.

III. A Note on Methodology: *Queering and Decolonizing Research*

The broad goal of this research is to better understand the complex nature of contemporary indigeneity in India, by examining its structural and ontological relationships to land and resistance. This paper draws from two sets of field research conducted in Attappady, Kerala: pre-dissertation 2010–2015 (about 8 months) and dissertation research in 2016, which is presently ongoing (6 months). I engage in a place-based ethnographic study visiting 82 of 187 hamlets, conducting over 85 individual and group interviews (~ 40 percent female) in Malayalam, Tamil and English with members of the Irular, Mudugar, Kurumbar Adivasi communities, rural settler families, local government officials, forest, education and tribal department officials, Adivasi and non-Adivasi land rights activists, and NGO workers. In order to understand how ontologies of land, and histories and geographies of land, mediate and construct contemporary indigeneity (which includes indigenous politics), I employ the narrative interview method to learn about land ontologies, with interviews typically ranging between 45 minutes to 2.5 hours.

The origins of this study are in scholar-activism: while volunteering with a digital community archiving project in Attappady in 2010, I was told by members of two Adivasi communities that their everyday lives had been greatly disrupted by the sudden and growing appearance of windmills on their supposedly protected lands (as a part of India's green energy initiative). Knowing I was a nascent researcher, they suggested I study the various development projects underway (dam-building, mining), to expose contradictions between their wants and the state's needs (Field notes, 2010). I thus began such a study, which has since evolved into a critical examination of their land struggles and politics in a historical frame.

The study's methodological grounding, however, emerged later on, when faced with having to marry academic rigor with scholar-activism. Drawing from ethnographic methods in anthropology and lessons in feminist research praxis (Harding, 1987) and indigenous studies, I developed the following method in conjunction with the QDF framework, as an exercise in decolonization. By creating space to position respect,

honor and humility centrally within the research process, and by seeing research into the politics of indigeneity as a form of critical resistance in itself, my aim is to decolonize research, following L. T. Smith (2012). In taking lessons from decolonial theorists seriously, this approach sees ontologies and theories shared during interviews as equally valid way of understanding the world (Nirmal, 2016), accepting morality and spirituality as governing principles (Deloria Jr., 1994; Waters, 1995; Cajete, 2000), and seeing ontology as a historically specific political and scientific knowing of the world. In other words, what I present below is a method involving ontological and epistemological understandings drawn from my research and my own social-world.

Stalker (2011) writes of the simultaneous construction of epistemological and ontological narratives of the researcher and the research, whereby the researcher's own world-making merges with those of the research subjects. While I am bound by own epistemological narratives, they are influenced by how I come to know and understand the world ontologically. I reconcile my thus cultivated "partial perspective" (Haraway, 1988) informed by my particular positionality, identity and context, with the theoretical QDF lenses I have chosen to employ, seeing research as:

> a) a relational encounter between two differently queered subjects – that of this brown female researcher within a largely white academy, and that of indigenous peoples and their allies within a predominantly nonindigenous world; b) a practice of solidarity that takes seriously indigenous epistemologies and methods, emphasizing a collective and relational knowledge production within living worlds. By taking into account the power differences between researcher and research subjects, this method emphasizes reflexivity and respect in all research settings (Nirmal, 2016).

In order to recognize and acknowledge how my particular positionality conditions the research process, I make the different worlds I inhabit known, that of North America and South India, and how I am situated in both of these spaces (as a student, teacher, friend, ally, researcher, etc.). I physically, and theoretically, travel back and forth be-

tween what Paola Bacchetta (2010) calls the "global northwest" and, to follow from her, the "global southeast" – in terms of identity, language, and ideas. Here, I see doing QDF research as not imposing ideas and representations from the northwest, but engaging with contextually produced ideas on their own terms, where research itself serves as a space for decolonization (Nirmal, 2016).

I position the entirety of my research within such a space: a *space of queerness,* where the researcher, the researched, and the research itself are queered by difference in their marginalities, oppressions, and liberations, and united by the common goal of decolonizing understandings and experiences of indigeneity. Within this *space of queerness* it becomes possible to question the ways in which marginality comes to be constructed, and recognize the agency of each entity in relation to the other. The *space of queerness*, in my analysis, accommodates multiple marginal positions, serving as an inclusive, shifting space of borderlands, and thus offers a more complex, less rigid understanding of contemporary indigeneity and indigenous resistance in Attappady. As a relational, decolonial zone, it allows the centering of previously marginal beings and ideas by recognizing both the shifting nature of marginality whereby the marginal is often within, and sometimes alongside the center, and the operation of marginality as a modality of resistance.

Within this space, I first situate myself as a morally and politically engaged, open, thinking subject. Hence, I use open signifiers instead of fixed categories (see Sundberg, 2011) exploring what "indigenous", "Adivasi", and "research", etc. mean in the context of this study (that is, I *queer* what each of these mean, contextually). In doing so, I work at being an active observer, rather than a passive researcher engaging with the communities in question on their own terms. That is, I recognize my "partial perspective" as one that is cultivated both consciously and subconsciously within my own socio-political context as a young female member of the Indian middle-class, evident both in my choice of questions and interpretations of answers. In order to be in solidarity with the Adivasis who participate in this research, I try to step in and out of my own perspectival limits by situating my positionality and identity in relation to theirs, and in moments of misunderstanding, asking how I should understand things differently. Finally, I use methods that are

amenable to these particular research conditions – I choose the narrative interview method for engaging in open conversations about indigeneity and indigenous resistance not limited to previously set questions, but by beginning with their particular life and land histories. I also set time aside for their questions about my ontologies, epistemologies, and life history. A recurring question I have been asked, for example, is whether, and what, I know of indigenous peoples in North America. This kind of place-based ethnographic research design allows me to learn from the research process, creating a feedback loop in conversation with research participants to enhance research content, outcomes, and most meaningfully, to learn how my research can be useful to them, as reciprocity is central to queer decolonial feminist research (for instance, by offering research and translation support services).

I also intentionally undertake a form of ethnographic refusal as a declaration of solidarity, and as a way of decolonizing the research process. Sherry Ortner (1995) argues that research into resistance must be ethnographically thick, showcasing the internal messiness of resistance groups in order to produce the most rigorous research. Yet, indigenous activists and scholars (e.g. Simpson, 2007) turn the model on its head, arguing instead for refusal to share certain information with the academy, in order to protect the interests of the research participants, as an engagement in solidarity politics. In direct contradiction to the rational-positivist quest for truth that the western academy is historically built upon, ethnographic refusal queers research by enabling such decolonial scholar-activism.

In fact, I see research *as* resistance (Brown and Strega, 2005), a queer process that destabilizes, rethinks, and questions normative operations of power. In doing so, it allows me to actively queer my relationship to research, situating myself in a subject-position alongside other research subjects as an active agent/observer, while *queering* indigeneity and indigenous resistance as not only already queer, but as already resistant.

In an attempt to bridge theory and practice, I engage the queer decolonial politics of my feminist research with the research process in the next section by examining my relationship with the *space of queerness* on the one hand, the queering of the Adivasi in relation to the state, and indigenous politics on the other, and the possibility of decolonial

feminist praxis that emerges at their meeting. By looking into the political conditions in Kerala that allow the indigenous person to be constructed as queer, I ask, what is the space of the indigenous person in contemporary politics? How can we better understand the complexity of the indigenous condition by positing it to be queer? And finally, I ask, what conditions of possibility are created by a queer decolonial feminist theory for envisioning a radical indigenous politics that goes beyond positioning the indigenous person as *marginal other*?

IV. *Queering* Contemporary Adivasi Indigeneities

In *queering* indigeneity and indigenous resistance, within the queer decolonial feminist framework, I undertake an analytical and political coupling of the two, and a related coupling of indigenous epistemologies and ontologies as they are produced and maintained through the performance and experience of indigeneity and indigenous resistance. In what follows, I use a rhizomatic approach to show the continuities between the analytically differentiated indigeneity and indigenous resistance as lying materially and symbolically within land. While the following sections are presented as distinct entities, they are best read together as fluid outcomes of *queering*, revealing multiple spiraling layers of different aspects of contemporary indigeneity.

1. *Queering* Indigeneity: Performing Indigenous Identity as Decolonial Resistance

> To speak of Indigeneity is to speak of colonialism and anthropology, as these are means through which Indigenous people have been known and sometimes are still known (Simpson, 2007: 67).

For the indigenous in India, the term "indigeneity" is laden with a peculiar problem: their historicity as the oldest occupants of the land predating all other groups is contested for its temporal accuracy. While in settler states the moment of encounter, i.e. colonization, demarcates clearly the antecedence of the colonized as an "indigenous" population as opposed to the settling outsiders, the Indian subcontinent's long and complex civilizational history obfuscates any such binary. As Alpa Shah (2007: 1807) writes, the Indian state maintains that there are no indigenous people

in the country owing to its long and complex history of migration and settlement. Within such a politics of erasure, *queering* indigeneity does the difficult task of making Adivasi presence as indigenous peoples visible, while illustrating how indigeneity, owing to its material and political ties to land, comes to be synonymous with indigenous resistance.

The term "Adivasi" is used as a socio-political signifier of indigeneity, indicating both the long historical presence of the indigenous in India, and the political mobilization of a previously marginalized people against their historical oppression and exploitation. The origin of the term is usually attributed to a series of resistances against British colonial occupation of Adivasi territory in Chotanagpur in central India in the 1930s, where it was used to counter the imperialists' claims to indigenous lands (see Shah, 2007 for a detailed look at its origins). While the legal term within political parlance continues to be "tribe" and "tribal" following colonial practices of social stratification, people have since used "Adivasi" to self-identify as political subjects with particular claims to land. As Baviskar (2007) writes, Adivasi is now a unique entity "animated by complex social practices that have accrued around it", with the capacity to demand a regime of rights that recognize the history of dispossession and exploitation suffered by Adivasi groups. In harnessing this capacity during resistance events and in the judicial system, indigenous rights activists often frame their demands as essential to indigenous identity, and as fundamentally different from the rest of society. Behind this regime of representation lies a form of strategic essentialism necessitated by real material needs, many of which are grounded in ontologies that are obscured by being different (or queer) and are therefore unrecognizable.

A critical analysis of the political condition of Adivasis under the British reveals a history of scientific racism that later translated into a more nuanced ethnic racism evident in colonial anthropology and the state policies it informed (Bhukya, 2008; Pati, 2010). Although these conditions prevail today, the parametrics of settler colonialism are considered inapplicable in the Indian context because of the physical departure of the British government in 1947. An explanation of the continuing conditions of coloniality lie in the internal colonialism of the Indian state evident in existing colonial ideas, institutions and policies on the one hand (for instance, the creation of the Forest Department through

the Forest Act that acts as a police force protecting forests as state territory and not Adivasi homelands) and the continuity of Adivasi resistance in response to such coloniality on the other.

Q*ueering* complicates the understanding of such resistance by revealing the continued antithetical presence of the Adivasi despite the combined power of colonialism, modernity, capitalism and development (all enacting various colonialities), to be a *form of resistance*. In the settler colonial context, the triumph of the colonial project (establishing and maintaining the sovereignty of the settler state) is marked by the material and cultural erasure of the indigene (Smith, 2010; Wolfe, 2006). Here, the continued presence of the indigenous person, and their knowledges and ideas, are antithetical to colonialism and coloniality, and therefore an enactment of decolonization and decoloniality. Likewise, in the context of internal colonialism, the continued existence of Adivasis as active indigenes, rather than passive state-subjects, embodying ontologies and epistemologies derived from ancestral relations to land, is an enactment of decolonization. Hereby, presence as resistance becomes decolonial praxis, where indigenous lands as sites of resistance become spaces to be decolonized, and indigenous epistemologies as decolonial knowledges open spaces to dismantle and destabilize modernist logics. Such a definition expands the idea of resistance to include embodied resistances, such that the non-engagement of some Adivasis in land struggles count as decolonial resistance, whereby simply by living and practicing their indigeneity, they enact decolonization. Here, resistance gains momentum in a decolonial politics derived from a certain ontological relationship to land that forms the basis of Adivasi identity. Significantly, decolonization, as a theoretical-political exercise, cannot be decoupled from resistance, as any theory of decolonization and decoloniality is also a theory of resistance.

While others have outlined the complexity of the indigenous condition in India (see for instance, Baviskar, 2005; Bhukya, 2008; Guha, 2012; Munshi, 2007, 2012; Khan, 2016; Shah, 2007) my goal is to illustrate its characteristics at a microcosmic level through ethnographic analysis in Kerala. Given Kerala's unique position within India as a communist state, though often acting in the interest of global capitalism by implementing neoliberal polices and steering state-led development plans, its Adivasis are also already queer in their relationship to the state as "non-modern

others". In order to understand the often contradictory and complex relationship of the indigene with this communist-neoliberal state, I *queer* indigeneity to reveal the emergent and existing modalities of resistance evident in the Adivasis' struggles against the colonialism of capitalism, development, and modernity in defense of their ancestral lands. Significantly, I propose that through such a QDF lens the Adivasis' resistances emerge primarily as epistemological and ontological enactments of decolonization.

1 (a) *Queering* Indigeneity Reveals that Ontological Differences Sustain Coloniality

In Kerala, Adivasis perform, enact, practice, negotiate, and strategically politicize their indigenous identity as decolonial acts of resistance, especially in their land struggles (I delve into this in a later section). While doing so, they operate within a *space of queerness,* firstly, as intentionally marginalized queer state-subjects in their relegated position as non-citizens living in federally controlled and managed forest areas subject to the rules of the state-society. Simultaneously, state policy is purportedly aimed at transforming Adivasis into full citizens by recognizing and subsequently correcting their marginal status through development plans. However, that this marginality is indeed constructed and maintained by the state becomes particularly evident in moments of deep ontological contradiction. For example:

> The Kerala government has several progressive laws and policies that recognize Adivasis' inalienable rights to their ancestral lands, rights that are enshrined in the fifth and sixth schedules of the Indian constitution, enabling them to live on their lands, in their ways. While implementing these laws, the state also administers development policies aimed at creating a common living standard across the state. A housing development project was proposed for a group of deep forest-dwelling Adivasis, to construct concrete houses either in their own (protected) lands, or if they choose to move out of the forest, in surrounding non-Adivasi areas identified by the state, as a way to bridge the aforementioned policy goals. However, in practice, while many in and outside the community critique this project for the high transportation costs,

> and hard human labor involved in moving building materials to such remote areas with little or no road access, some point to the lack of ecological meaning of these houses when compared to their vernacular bamboo and mud architecture. Several community members say they would rather have better roads and transportation so that they can decide for themselves what kind of houses they would like to live in, have better access to healthcare (given traditional systems have been structurally depleted by various modern interventions), and an easier commute to sites of work and learning. (Field notes, 2016)

As this example reveals, Adivasi politics are not merely subject to the internal colonialism of the state at the policy level, but also to the operation of coloniality at an everyday level. The state exerts both direct (and material) and indirect (and ideological, structural) power over the Adivasis (at both individual and collective bodily and structural levels), respectively through the physical enforcement of laws governing boundaries and norms by police officers and forest officials, and through official policies, mandates, laws and practices of the state in its many forms (through federal laws governing land acquisition, forest conservation and management; policies of land use mediated by the forest department and the revenue department; and practices enforced by state-run and state-supported institutions, including NGOs). And such power is felt by Adivasis who operate both within and outside state spaces. *Queering* this example reveals that state policies create and maintain conditions of marginality and coloniality by failing to recognize the deep ontological divide between the forest department, which maintains that roads are ecologically unsuitable and unadvisable, the tribal department that sees the Adivasis as impudent children unwilling to leave archaic spaces, and Adivasis, who see themselves and their needs as an integral part of the ecological sustainability of the region.

1 (b) *Queering* Indigeneity Reveals that Adivasi Self-Recognition Queers Power Relations

Queering indigeneity reveals its complex of meanings ranging between individual self-identification as socio-cultural-ecological expression, and strategic political identification as an agentive political category, particu-

larly in the context of land rights. These meanings are often in direct response to the coloniality of externally imposed identities that range between the ecologically superior "noble savage" and the ignorant, non-modern, uncivilized primitive (visible for instance in human-interest media reports on poverty/development/conservation).

Historically, this self-recognition becomes politically necessary because of the linear vision of the state and other dominant systems of power that cast Adivasis as culturally distinct "tribals" with different socio-political systems that are, both, inside and outside, state-society, and who through processes of mainstreaming must be transformed into full citizens of the state. Within queer visions of the Adivasis themselves, they are cast as indigenous peoples, identifying with others across the world with legitimate (even if not "legal" within the domains of the state) claims to ancestral territories and socio-ecological political systems. This self-identification and political positioning is in itself a resistance to the colonial category of "tribe" that continues to narrowly define their complex, nuanced and diverse existence. I explain this further by reflecting on recurring narrative used by several Adivasis that is best understood when situated within a *space of queerness*.

> When the Adivasis speak of themselves as Adivasis, as *the* indigenous peoples, and others as "those of the country", "country-man/boy", "country-woman/girl", "country-person/child" and as "generalites", their linguistic choice is based on a politics of difference, that when *queered*, reveals the "country" to be the periphery (even if bigger and more powerful) surrounding their indigenous center (Field notes, 2016).

At first glance it seems politically useful, especially in a supposed "welfare state" (like Kerala) to adopt and support a politics of marginality that discursively and materially positions Adivasis as those on the "outside", needing and deserving government support and welfare. However, the resulting politics of control (through state mandates and policies), and the more insidious politics of pitting agency against identity, wherein agency is only available to those willing to relinquish, or at least successfully disguise, their indigenous identity, leaves Adivasi indigeneity in a political vacuum devoid of justice. *Queering* refuses to accept

the normativity of such a subject position that builds figurative walls around what is intentionally placed at the center, and the plebeian world, which in this case are Adivasi worlds. By challenging such an operation of power at its core by revealing its colonial bases, *queering* also makes it possible to reimagine a politics of decolonial resistance that takes the inversion of the margin and the center as its starting point.

Thus, while *queering* Adivasi indigeneity in Kerala reveals its colonial relation with the state, it also reveals the relational construction of marginality undertaken by both groups. Owing to the fact that power is indeed vested in the state, this relationship is often perceived to be fixed and unchanging, when in fact it is performed differently in different contexts. While the state's performance is accepted as part of its pluralist governance strategy, performed Adivasi indigeneity is automatically cast as inauthentic and essentialist, or authentic and essentialist (depending on whether one uses a positive or negative conception of difference). However, the tendency to see performed Adivasi indigeneity as inauthentic is not a problem that is particular to India alone. It is therefore a significant political move in the Indian context to understand Adivasi indigeneity as fluid and politically strategic, because such an understanding not only posits the indigene to be an active political agent, but also creates possibilities for mobilizing and negotiating land relations and rights. *Queering* contests the state's (and often, the state-society's) presupposition of historical linearity that demands a fixed unilateral representation of Adivasis as primitive, dependent, and "non-modern" (the "authentic", recognizable identity), in order to accept/allow their engagement in land politics and resistances for land. *Queering* reveals instead that the space of indigeneity (which is also *the space of queerness)* includes material land, as indigeneity is always-already in relation to land.

1 (c) *Queering* Indigeneity Reveals that Land is the Material *Space of Queerness*

The politics of land is indeed constructed with the indigenes on the periphery, in their own semantics and everyday practices and lives. While they operate at the margins, and sometimes within the center (e.g. as government and NGO employees), much of their ontological and epistemological imaginaries (and consequently narratives) are built with them

very squarely in the center. *Queering*, as that which troubles the normative, is thus immensely useful in understanding these subterranean operations of power, especially the shifting, growing, morphing and moving of power across different positions.

I *queer* Adivasi resistance in India to further demonstrate the complexities of indigeneity and indigenous politics in Kerala, and also to show its inextricable ties with land and land politics. To reiterate, it is not my intention to separate indigeneity and indigenous resistance as distinct and unrelated categories, but rather to analytically *queer* the two separately in order to further highlight the theoretical and practical continuities between them.

In Attappady, several Adivasi land rights activists and community members (not all) identify an ontological relationship to land that is represented in particular historical narratives pertaining to their territories.

> If the land isn't there, we are not there. Without us, there is no land. Without land we cannot live, we cannot cultivate crops. Nowadays all the talk about land rights is because of this… all the problems we face are because of [problems with, or not having] land. We Adivasis have an umbilical connection with the land, that is who we are. That is our connection. It is because of not having land that we have all these problems, our connection is broken. (Group interview on February 7, 2016; translated from Tamil and Malayalam by the author)

The struggle for land rights that has been underway in the region is underwritten by such an ontological relationship to land, as indigenous scholars in the Americas have also asserted, "land occupies as an ontological framework for understanding relationships" (Coulthard, 2010: 79). In fact, Adivasis ontological claims extend to referring themselves as the land, and to the land as the living world (Field notes, 2014, 2016).

In their resistances to numerous state-led and private sector development initiatives, as well as national and international conservation programs, the Adivasis of Attappady use various legal mechanisms to claim their ancestral rights to their previously common lands. In doing so, they often perform their indigeneity through an identity politics that attempts to speak the state's language in order to gain both recognition

and acceptance (see Coulthard, 2014). In moments when their actions are not channeled through these legal vestiges of power, they are either dismissed as petulant or misinformed (in narratives that cast them as childlike, without political awareness or agency), or in stark contrast, more nefariously, as "Naxalites" or "Maoists", and therefore both bodily targeted and categorically dismissed as internal terrorists without justifiable rights to resistance. *Queering* resistance at such complex junctures reveals several underlying ontological problems, including the valuation of land, and the meaning of land as forest.

While there are clear differences in the ways land is valued by the state and market on the one hand, and Adivasis on the other, it is ontological linkages that are befogged by linear valuations seeing land as place devoid of relations. When asked what image comes to their mind when thinking of the word "land", most Adivasis I interviewed said they saw (living worlds containing) mountains, rivers, their homes/homestead, cultivable areas, animals, trees, birds, their ancestors and built structures (Field notes, 2014–2016). One striking response was "everything and everybody in the family" (Interview notes, 2016). I draw on a series of conversations in March 2016 to illustrate how the Adivasis frame the ontological significance of their land as lying within a particular mountain:

> The mountain peak that can be seen from the Attappady valley, from all of its hills except one, is God say the Adivasis. While one of the Adivasi groups continue their tradition of undertaking a ritualistic pilgrimage every year to the peak to celebrate and worship the God, others worship at the fairly new temple that has been built in the God's honor. Those who undertake the annual pilgrimage say what is atop the peak is a stone, a part of the mountain that is an embodied God, and that the space itself is a shape shifting space that grows to accommodate all those who make the climb. Because of the influence of Hindu settlers the temple is known to all those who visit as a local Siva temple, as the mountain God is now seen as a form of Lord Siva. While both locals and visitors from nearby towns visit the temple, many fail to pay attention to its particular location. When standing outside the temple, what is visible from its gateway is the peak, the abode of the mountain god, the most sacred of spaces. The temple stands in unspoken, symbolic

tribute to the real place of the Adivasi God, even as it houses their hybrid Hindu structural form.

Queering Adivasi land relations in this instance goes to show that it is not land as abstracted space that has meaning and value, but particular lands that have ontological, not only spiritual and material, value. It also shows that Adivasi resistances for land are not simply about cultivable spaces (even though they are that), but also about the materiality derived from particular ontological relations to specific lands. In *queering* indigenous resistance, this not only reveals historical continuities between expressions of indigeneity (as resistance), but also the continuing ontological violence rendered by multiple colonialities that by imposing an ontological and epistemological hierarchy fail to see real and material ties to lands and living worlds, resulting in what Blaser (2009, 2010, 2014) calls "ontological politics".

2. *Queering* Gender and Sexuality

In this section, I employ *queering* as an active tool to destabilize nodes, structures, spaces and processes in which power becomes ossified with regard to gender and sexuality in an attempt to unearth some alternative, decolonial understandings of the varied and often nefarious ways in which normative understandings serve to undercut the complexities of contemporary Adivasi indigeneity.

The notion that gender difference is often externally imposed through varied experiences of power, ranging from the colonizer's advocated cultural superiority to the invading populace's construction of its socio-cultural-ecological practices as the norm (for example by attributing gender to gods, co-opting pagan worship practices), and the state's legal system, has been debated and explored by various scholars. For instance, the construction of heteropatriarchy is seen as a key feature of (settler) colonialism (Smith, 2010; Arvin et al., 2013) where the conjoining of colonialism with patriarchy enforces the violent removal of the indigenous person from the land and imposes several binaries, including those of male/female, body/mind, lived knowledge/learned knowledge, and so on (Simpson, 2012). Such hierarchical and binary constructions are also evident in Attappady, a key example of which is the transforma-

tion of the mountain God into a male Hindu God, as described above. While the coloniality evident in these lingering institutions and practices is indeed significant, noting their decisive impacts on Adivasis gender norms is only the first layer of the onion that *queering* aims to peel.

2 (a) *Queering* Adivasi History Reveals Gender-Land-Ecology Relations

British colonialism, the usual referent of India's colonial history, did much by way of importing British patriarchy to the Indian colony. However, the Adivasis' relative historical isolation allowed them a degree of protection from experiencing the full weight of colonialism in the early years. While the British visited Adivasi lands in Attappady in the early twentieth century to conduct land surveys and were guided in their mapping efforts by some Adivasi groups living in the valley areas, other groups of Adivasis living in higher, more rugged mountain areas insist that their lands were not surveyed till the late 1930's (Field notes, 2011–2016). By most historical accounts, British colonialism is considered *the* colonial experience that shaped India's political, cultural, social and ecological history. In the case of Adivasis, this is especially true as it was British colonialism that was materially and politically felt through organized and systematic visits and territorial sanctions that left their imprint on Adivasi lands and bodies.

In Attappady, the invasion of Adivasi territory in the early twentieth century by rural settlers (an early form of internal colonialism) and the subsequent occupation of Adivasi commons through negotiation, trickery, and force, led to major socio-ecological and cultural transformations. In what follows, I examine the intersectional effects of such transformations illustrating how the colonization of Adivasi lands and their subsequent colonial experiences work at a deeper level to disrupt and radically change gender, land, and ecological relations, often with deleterious effects.

> Previously we didn't have any distinctions between who was male, and who was female. We don't see difference like that. Now, we do. Whether adults or children, we never used to care [about gender]. In fact, we

> didn't wear any clothes till we were about fifteen[2]. We all work equally, it is not like you country folk [with your gender differences]. During Kambalakkadu the women and men dance together and celebrate for many days. We used to do this every year and it was a big deal… it was a massive celebration but now we don't do it anymore. The circumstances have changed. The forest has taken over the lands that we used to cultivate, and we need particular spaces to do these ceremonies that we don't have access to. That is a major struggle for us now, not having access to our usual lands – because we have different uses for our lands that the forest department doesn't recognize. (February 10, 2016; Translated from Tamil and Malayalam by the author)

This extended excerpt illustrates a number of things, showing both the scope of *queering* and the depth of complexities hidden beneath declarations of change that are often regarded as "normal" and simplistic indicators of the changing times. What is obvious at first glance, is that Adivasis gender relations are significantly transformed by restrictions in access to the lands that were previously available for different uses. Kambalakkadu is a harvest ceremony that brings together men and women in a cultural-ecological celebration intended to foster a spirit of thanks and celebration in particular cultivable areas. Now with all forestlands being under federal control, and with the forest department, through a colonial history of scientific forestry and forest management policies (Sivaramakrishnan, 1995) designating areas for habitation and cultivation by its own logics, Kambalakkadu is no longer performed. In fact, the particularity of cultivable areas and the historical use of shifting cultivation were and continue to be entirely disregarded in forest service allocation processes.

What also emerges while *queering* is the impact of changing gender norms on Adivasi work culture as realms of shared work have now shifted across gender lines, particularly because of the restrictions in access to cultivable lands. While in some cases it has transformed both women and men into unwilling welfare subjects who no longer engage in agricultural work outside the home, in others, changes in the nature of

[2] This particular interviewee was the oldest in the group (he estimated his age to be around sixty).

agricultural practices shifting from subsistence food crop cultivation to state-supported cash-crop cultivation (as the latter is no longer economically viable) has been accompanied by a skewing of the division of labor. In fact, *queering* further reveals that subsistence farming included commodity exchanges in the early postcolonial years with Adivasis selling part of their harvest and gathered food (honey and tubers, for example) in order to purchase small items such as rock salt, small onions and black pepper (Field notes, June 2014, February 2016).

Furthermore, *queering* understandings of gender within this context reveals how experiences of indigeneity are differentiated along lines of gender, age, class, and so on. It also reveals the transverse material links between indigeneity and indigenous resistance deriving from land that serves as a source of commonality, rather than difference. Just as *queering* the death of infants in Attappady reveals causal ties between malnutrition of infants and pregnant mothers, and land loss, alienation from land, and the subsequent changes in socio-political-ecological practices, *queering* indigeneity along different lines reveals its multiple ties with land.

Queering reveals the milieu of land uses and land relations that sustain Adivasi communities, mediating, negotiating, and organizing their use of particular lands for particular purposes. For instance, "kaaTu" refers to land for agriculture, while "maNu" refers to all land, territory and living world, "veeTu" refers to home, and "solai" refers to the forest (Interview notes, 2016). Subsuming all of these under the category of "land" and then identifying land use practices and modalities of access produces much material and discursive violence in its wake. The land rights derived from such a narrow and potentially harmful vision are then mediated and negotiated by the Forest Department in the region, as the agent of the state responsible for meting out use and access rights. *Queering* land rights in this context reveals that not all rights recognized by the community in its practices can be acknowledged by the state so long as it maintains its singular vision.

Further, *queering* also reveals how these multiple land uses and practices intersect with gender and health in nefarious ways. For instance, in an effort to address the growing problem of neo/prenatal and child malnutrition, the state, in collaboration with community members, local and International NGOs, conducted extensive research into the prob-

lem's origins. It concluded that the origins lay in drastic changes in lifestyle and food consumption patterns, and hence introduced a number of progressive measures to ensure an increase in nutrition, healthcare access, and overall wellbeing. One such intervention was the creation of locally operated, female-run "community kitchens" aimed at feeding two undernourished populations – the very young and the very old. Ironically, the kitchens provided rice and lentils, both of which are not a part of the traditional diet, whose loss led to malnutrition in the first place. When *queered,* the links between colonial erasure of food systems, and the need to revive and rejuvenate pre-colonial land use practices, becomes evident. Similarly, another intervention involved providing Ragi, protein-rich millet that was once a staple in their diet. This project has been relatively more successful owing to its context-specificity, dictated in large part by the fact that it was designed in consultation with the local Nodal Health Officer with extensive local contextual knowledge. Yet, instead of making local cultivation of Ragi possible and prosperous (or putting long term policies in place alongside short term planning), the government rations packaged Ragi produced elsewhere in the state to the communities. Hence, once again, the ontological and material ties between land, as a source of ecological continuity and livelihood, and life itself, were not visible to the unqueered eye of the state.

2 (b) *Queering* Sexuality at a Glance

Queering Adivasi sexuality reveals another set of incongruences and epistemological ruptures in the linear vision of the state.

> During the course of a conversation with a group of Adivasi activists in 2014, I was told that a group of Adivasis in the region had been following a marriage practice where two young post-pubescent individuals choose one another, and build a hut together that they then occupy as husband and wife. However, the imposition of a state law criminalized any sexual encounter under the age of 18 as rape and sexual abuse of a minor, leading to accusations of sexual deviance in the less serious cases, and to accusations of rape in more serious ones. This served to disproportionately affect young men, casting them as rapists, while casting some young women as sexual deviants, and others, in the rare

> case, as rape victims. Yet, in strong contrast, a young Adivasi woman who was raped by a rural settler was not recognized as a rape victim because of the presumed sexual deviance of Adivasi culture where all sexual encounter is assumed to be consensual because of the purported difference in Adivasi sexual practices. (Field notes, June 2014)

Hereby, operating within a *space of queerness*, Adivasis become sexual subjects without any judicial recourse simply because of their difference (or, queerness). Thus *queering* narratives about gender and sexuality, or any other category under study, reveals not only what underlies the thing itself, but also reveals cross connections and linkages unbounded by the category, making it analytically open and malleable. *Queering* in this context also critically points to the links to land, identifying land as the source of all decolonial Adivasi politics. Hence, *queering* is not just about decolonizing relations to land, but also about the decolonization of everything in relation, as these open categories are inextricably linked.

V. Some Queer Thoughts that Persist

It is not easy to piece together the many ill-fitting pieces of the jigsaw that makes up the tale of the Adivasis in India, and particularly, in Kerala. *Queering* the Adivasi story offers one way to connect seemingly disparate nodal points in the story by bringing colonialism to the forefront, identifying how they are situated within the condition of coloniality, and highlighting their resulting decolonial resistance. Thus far, I have drawn a few lines of analysis to show how *queering* challenges the supposed marginality of the Adivasi, making their agentive power visible. By foregrounding a decolonial perspective, *queering* shows how the internal colonialism of the Indian state categorically marginalizes the Adivasi both materially and discursively, as a condition of its operation. It is through the modality of operation of power under coloniality that Adivasi marginality is thus produced. *Queering* indigeneity reveals how such constructed marginality can be challenged, negotiated and transformed through resistance, making the need for decolonization imminently visible.

Queering therefore offers a moment of possibility to challenge and change conventional discourses around indigeneity in Attappady, in particular, and in India in general. For instance, it shows how marginality

is systematically constructed by various structures of oppressive power and finds no place in the Adivasis' own self-imaginaries. Yet Adivasis also sometimes engage in a strategic, political performance of marginality to claim their indigeneity in the eyes of the state (for various policy benefits, and in their resistances). Seen within a performative frame, an active dynamic thus emerges between acts of centering and decentering Adivasi identity. *Queering* Adivasi indigeneity in this context challenges the binary between "modern" ontology, and Adivasi land ontologies, enriching possibilities for Adivasi futurities to be a part of a "modern" Indian imaginary from which it is otherwise excluded based on essentialized understandings of difference. By casting Adivasis as intentionally *queer* in relation to the state and non-indigenous state-society, it is possible to see the space of indigeneity as a *space of queerness* with power vested within its confines.

Queering allows the analytical, and therefore discursive coupling of indigeneity and indigenous resistance within the *space of queerness* that includes the material land conceptualized as living worlds of interconnected beings. By revealing the deep ontological linkages between land, indigeneity, and resistance, and showing how a politics of land is not confined to material struggles for land alone, it offers a range of liberatory possibilities. Operating within a queer decolonial feminist framework, it produces a number of such conditions of possibility for envisioning a radical indigenous politics that goes beyond positioning the indigenous person as *marginal other*. For one, it stands to impact the ways in which Adivasi relations to land are understood in state policymaking and practice. At its simplest, it advocates for a peeling exercise, employing *queering* to unearth the complexities that lie beneath the surface.

Queering also expands present conceptions of indigenous resistance showing how ontological differences in conceptions of land mediate and characterize resistance. By bringing a queer decolonial feminist lens to the study of resistance, it also expands the understanding of resistance in general, outside of the classical social movement frame (see McAdam et al., 1996). While there are indeed Adivasi social movements engaged in resistance in Kerala, like the Adivasi Gothra Maha Sabha (see Steur, 2011), *queering* resistance in Attappady reveals diverse resistance politics that cannot be contained within the umbrella of a social movement. For

instance, by situating the meaning and nature of resistance within a decolonial frame, *queering* reveals the active, continuing presence of the Adivasi within the modern nation state to be an act of decolonial resistance. Additionally, *queering* complicates resistance by seeing acts of refusal, non-engagement, and denial and at their core, ontological difference as decolonial engagements and acts of resistance. Even when Adivasis do not engage in protests and movement actions, they continue to live in living worlds of their own ontological, epistemological, and material making. This continued presence and prevalence of Adivasi land ontologies, and the living worlds that their ontologies enact and sustain despite years of colonial intervention, indicates presence to be a modality of resistance in general, and a form of embodied resistance in particular.

Such interpretations of resistance do not fit into notions of "everyday resistance" (Scott, 2008) either. While everyday resistances capture the elusive, intangible characteristics of covert resistance, they do not account for active presence as resistance. Presence as resistance indicates the ontological foundations of resistance, showing active presence within ontologically distinct (even if not entirely dissimilar) living worlds (as spaces of resistance) to be a form of decolonial resistance. As such, embodied resistances evident in Attappady are not only dynamic responses and reactions, but also a priori forms of ontologically distinct existence effecting active disengagement. Such resistance, while insufficiently explained by studies of individual/collective, covert/overt forms of resistance, can be better understood as a conjoined component of decoloniality where that which is decolonial, is already in resistance. That is, by illustrating the complex and multiple ties between various internal colonial forces acting on the Adivasis and their impacts on Adivasi land ontologies and living worlds, *queering* reveals indigenous resistance to be fundamentally decolonial in nature. Hereby, to engage in decolonization is to engage in resistance and vice-versa.

Further, *queering's* usefulness as an analytical tool can be harnessed in several other ways that have not been within the scope of this paper. Some central questions that remain have to do with a second layer of analysis that *queering* makes possible – for instance, by revealing the deep ontological linkages between land, food, and health, it can enrich the field of environmental justice by creating pathways to decolonize cur-

rent debates in the field. In doing so, it can point to food sovereignty as an end goal of decolonial environmental justice in the Adivasi context.

In another sense, *queering* as a tool of decolonization can impact the recognition and production of decolonial knowledges and theories by actively *queering* Adivasi land ontologies as theory. Relatedly, by pointing to the ontological basis of resistance, *queering* also significantly casts the alternative understandings produced, mobilized, and effected by such resistances as theory. Taiaiake Alfred (1999, 2005) has argued that indigenous resistance must imagine alternative futures through political strategies divorced from the state sovereignty model. He argues for what Simpson (2012) calls "looking back" to look forward, drawing from indigenous knowledges, ontologies, and practices "the autonomy of individual conscience, non-coercive authority, and the deep interconnection between human beings and other elements of the creation". The production of such decolonial frameworks through resistance can also be seen as an iterative practice of *queering* whereby future moments of possibility are created and imagined from points of similarity and connection, rather than difference. Through its various enactments of liberatory practices and politics, *queering* ultimately stands to markedly serve justice to peoples for whom it has too long been delayed, and denied. As such, it stands to contribute much to decolonization in this part of the global South's fourth world. As Leroy Little Bear (2005: xii) writes,

> Decolonization as a tangible unknown leaves room for dialogue and for dissent, as well as for coming together to each contribute to one another's shared visions and goals. We don't write this as a conclusion because the end of the story has not been written and, in truth, the story isn't even linear in that way. Indigenous stories circle back, are performed and re-performed, and, with each telling and re-telling a new layer is added, a new truth revealed.

Queering, too, in its continued decolonizing actions and enactments can plough on in hopes of peeling, telling, re-telling, and adding new layers to contemporary Adivasi indigeneity, its politics, and possibilities.

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