

Resisting Power, Powering Resistance: A Case Study of the Broadlands Hydropower Project in Kithulgala

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In early March 2014, the White-Water Rafting Association in Kithulgala organised a protest demanding that their livelihoods be protected from the effects of a proposed mini-hydropower plant – the Broadlands Hydropower Project (BHP) – which would divert water from the Kelani River. The protest and its media coverage presented a zero-sum struggle between safeguarding local livelihoods in Kithulgala and national electricity generation. One of the placards held at the protest succinctly communicated this dichotomous confrontation when it asked, ‘Should it [the river] be used for power or sports?’.

Given the close association of white-water rafting with Kithulgala, such a framing of the issue would appeal to many. In fact, prior to this research, the authors too understood the conflict in Kithulgala as articulated by the White-Water Rafting Association and media. At the outset, this study sought to understand this competition between local business interests and national energy needs for the utilisation of water resources in Kithulgala. However, it soon became apparent that the hydropower plant in Kithulgala, and local opposition to it, was more complex.

Despite portrayals of much of Kithulgala’s economic life being under threat, during the course of fieldwork, it appeared that many locals were indifferent to the project. Why did opposition to the hydropower plant in Kithulgala not find unanimous support among the community? How does such ambivalence help to reflect on the nature of resistance to the project? To make sense of this puzzle, we draw on Michel Foucault’s theorising of power and resistance.

The paper is structured as follows: section 1 is a brief introduction to Kithulgala and the Broadlands Hydropower Project; section 2 discusses the theoretical framework employed in the paper; section 3 examines narratives of the ‘environment’, the ‘economy’, and the ‘village’ in Kithulgala; and section 4 makes concluding remarks on the implications of such narratives for power and resistance.

Kithulgala and the Broadlands Hydropower Project (BHP)

Kithulgala is situated in the Yatiyanthota Divisional Secretariat area, in the Kegalle district. Over the last two decades, the expansion of white-water rafting in Kithulgala has made it an extremely popular tourist attraction. Today, a thriving economy has developed around this water sport, and it provides a lucrative source of income to many in Kithulgala. Additionally, white-water rafting has grown to be a way of life in Kithulgala, and for some, even constitutes part of the village’s identity.

The BHP will have a capacity of 35MW and is projected to supply 127GWh of energy to the national grid annually (Ministry of Power and Renewable Energy 2016). The Project is located in the middle reach of the Kelani River, just downstream from the Polpitiya Power Station (Nippon Koei Co. Ltd. 2004). The main dam, which is a 24m high concrete gravity dam, is situated in the Ambagamuwa division, Nuwara Eliya District (Ceylon Electricity Board & Ecoeye Co. Ltd. 2012). The powerhouse for the project is located in

the Yatiyanthota division, Kegalle District. A maximum flow of 20m³/sec is diverted from one of the main tributaries of the Kelani River, the Kehelgamu Oya, to the reservoir by a weir.

As a result of diverting water in the Kelani river for the project, thirteen of the eighteen rapids in Kithulgala will be lost. Since white-water rafting is carried out along these rapids, their loss will have grave consequences for the local tourism industry. Thus, businesses relying on white-water rafting have agitated against the construction of the BHP.

In constructing the powerhouse, the project acquired the lands of sixteen families. The project authorities offered compensation to all sixteen families. Most accepted the compensation and were relocated. However, four families refused to accept the compensation, claiming that it was unfairly calculated and therefore insufficient. These families are not opposed to the project, but rather demand fair compensation for their loss. Apart from those involved in white-water rafting and those demanding fair compensation, there is not much resistance to the BHP in Kithulgala.

Theoretical Framework

This paper employs Michel Foucault's conceptualisation of resistance to understand the lack of resistance to the BHP in Kithulgala. In "The Subject and Power", Foucault's thesis is that the domination of any social group, and the movement that forms as resistance to it, are collectively central to the explication of the power relations functioning within that particular society (Foucault, 1982). His argument stems from the fact that "power is less a confrontation between two adversaries or the linking of one to the other than a question of government" (Foucault 1982, p. 789). He perceives power as a relational concept, "as a mode of action upon the actions of others" (Foucault 1982, p. 790), a governing of the actions of others. He recommends seeing power relations, not as the "study of a series of institutions" but as being "rooted in the system of social networks" (Foucault 1982, pp. 792-793).

In writing about power, Foucault also recognises the centrality of resistance. He argues for a resistance that is diffused and not hierarchical.

Since power is spread throughout society and not localised in any particular place, the struggle against power must also be diffuse... While power is sustained through inequality, resistance is built on

the absence of hierarchy (Pickett 1996, pp. 458-459).

Resistance, while necessarily diffuse in nature, is united through its "shared experiences of subjugation": essentially it is a "revolt against shared 'intolerables'" (Pickett 1996, p. 460). Within this Foucauldian reading of power and resistance, the extent to which these 'intolerables' are shared becomes a crucial question, considering that it is only an assumption of a shared experience that seems to enable mass 'revolt'. Foucault claims a "daily 'ethico-political' choice" in which 'we need to decide what constitutes the greatest danger and struggle against it' (Pickett 1996, p. 461). Thus, the thing we resist is a conscious choice made daily by the individual – and is not inevitable.

This framework of power and resistance provides a suitable lens to analyse the situation in Kithulgala. Claims to a collective resistance to power are complicated in exploring the narratives that emerge from there. They question the distinction between power and resistance, and provide an interesting case study of how Foucault's broader theorisation of power and resistance applies to small scale movements of resistance.

Narratives about the Environment

Different groups articulate competing narratives on the environmental impact of the BHP and white-water rafting in Kithulgala. On the one hand, those involved in white-water rafting contest the project officials' narratives that the hydropower plant has minimal environmental impact. On the other hand, other groups in Kithulgala challenge the narrative which presents white-water rafting as having no adverse environmental impact.

The BHP presents itself as an environmentally friendly project through several key factors. First, it is a run-of-the-river (ROR) type power-plant, operating without water storage, using the flow within a river channel. The ROR system regulates the water level, allowing a proportion of flow to be diverted down a secondary channel to a turbine before it is returned to the main channel further downstream (Anderson, et al. 2015). This type of hydropower plant is argued to be less harmful to the environment, compared to reservoir-based hydropower plants (Modal, et al. 2014).

The project's environmental impact assessment (EIA) identifies potential environmental risks, but is also quick to dismiss such risks. While recognising that the

reduction in the flow of water will change the conditions of the riverbed leading to some changes in the richness, diversity and ecological balance of aquatic fauna species, it goes on to state that the reduction in water volume is unlikely to drive any endemic or threatened species towards extinction (Electric Power Development Co Ltd and Nippon Koei Co., Ltd. 2004). The EIA further claims that only weeds and invasive plants on the ‘edges’ of the forest reserve will be affected during the construction phase, and that the ‘core’ of forest reserves in Kithulgala will remain unharmed. Thus, the project presents itself as an environmentally friendly endeavour, causing minimal harm to the environment.

Second, the project presents itself as meeting national energy needs through renewable sources, rather than non-renewable sources. According to the Project Design Document Form, “The main purpose of the project is to generate electricity from the renewable energy resources... and to contribute [to the] sustainable development of the country,” and further states, “The project will reduce the environmental impacts associated with the production of electricity by substituting fossil fuels with water – a source of renewable energy” (Ceylon Electricity Board & Ecoeye Co. Ltd. 2012, pp. 2 & 29). Thus, the project situates itself as being an environmentally friendly source of energy.

Third, the project highlights its contribution towards reducing green-house gas emissions. Research suggests that thermal power emits between 900-1,200kg of Carbon Dioxide equivalent for every MWhr of electricity generated, whereas run-of-river type hydroelectric facilities only emit 0.5-152kg of Carbon Dioxide equivalent (Steinhurst, et al. 2012). Project documents estimate that the annual emission reductions attributable to the proposed project activity are 83,075 tons of Carbon Dioxide equivalent (Ceylon Electricity Board & Ecoeye Co. Ltd. 2012). Thus, the project emphasises its ‘green’ credentials by underscoring its reduced green-house gas emissions.

Fourthly, and linked to the previous point, the BHP is the first in Sri Lanka to be registered under the Clean Development Mechanism (CDM) of the Kyoto Protocol (Nizam 2013). Article 12 of the Kyoto Protocol defines the CDM as a mechanism allowing countries to implement emission-reduction projects that would earn them “saleable certified emission reduction (CER) credits” (United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change 2014). These would count towards meeting targets of the Kyoto Protocol. As such, the project situates itself within global efforts aimed at

combating climate change. Considering the narratives outlined above, it appears that one way in which the project seeks to gain legitimacy is by highlighting its environmentally friendly approach to generating energy.

However, business establishments in Kithulgala contest that the project will have only minimal impacts on the environment, foregrounding certain points which challenge the project’s narrative. Suren,¹ a leader of the protest, alleges that the construction of the project was in fact causing harm to the environment. He argues that a large area of forest had been cleared in order to construct the power plant, and that the project did have adverse environmental impacts. Another respondent, Madara² argues that an endemic fish species by the name of *rathu bulath hapaya* will lose its habitat. She also worries that the 28 endemic bird species in the forest reserve would be adversely affected through the construction of the power plant. In contrast to this negative narrative about the project, those engaged in white-water rafting choose to present white-water rafting in Kithulgala as one which causes no harm at all to the environment. They assert that water sports there do not alter the environment and therefore safeguard it. Thus, they question the rationale behind undermining an industry which causes no harm at all to the environment, for the sake of a hydropower plant which will certainly harm the environment.

Others in Kithulgala, however, have concerns not only about the hydropower project but about impacts of tourism as well. Ruwan,³ a local environmentalist acknowledges the same environmental harms the project would likely cause as cited by the rafters. Furthermore, he is of the opinion that the project will be detrimental to local water sources, and is deeply offended that communities who relied on the river previously for water, would now have to use a tap line. He sees this as a disruption of a way of life as well. However, in speaking of the tourism industry, he accuses the hotels situated along the river of constructing their toilet pits next to the river. “You just go to a few of these hotels and see where they have their toilet pits. Some have their toilet pits in the river itself! Others have the pit close to the river, so that when the water level rises the toilet pits are also covered. Everything in the pit then enters the river” (Interview with Ruwan, 24 August 2017). Some government bureaucrats confirm this view, but lament that they find it difficult to report the issue of toilet pits, as they are fearful of the consequences of challenging the hoteliers. Therefore, it is interesting that while the

environmental critique of the hydropower project is more visible in Kithulgala, the same critique of the tourism industry also exists, albeit in a more muted form.

Different actors in Kithulgala have competing narratives regarding the environmental impact of the BHP and white-water rafting. These competing narratives challenge a dichotomous understanding of narratives of power and resistance. They undermine the attempt to position the issue in Kithulgala as a clear-cut struggle between the project and the community.

Narratives of the Economy

Given the importance of white-water rafting for the livelihoods of many individuals in Kithulgala, narratives on the economic consequences of the project are a crucial aspect of the resistance to the BHP. Once again, we find the same three groups presenting various claims, facts and arguments, to support their positions.

While the BHP narrative emphasises its environmentally friendly approach to electricity generation, it also sees itself as contributing to the national energy supply. “The objective of the Project is to strengthen the power source for middle and/or peak demand. Electricity to be produced by the Project will be connected to the national grid, therefore, the beneficiaries are all the users in Sri Lanka” (Ceylon Electricity Board & Ecoeye Co. Ltd. 2012, pp. 2-1). It goes on to state that the “development of hydropower is largely expected from the viewpoint of the energy security of the country with short domestic energy resources”. Thus, the project presents itself as contributing to the nation’s needs, and better ensuring the country’s energy security.

Those involved in tourism in Kithulgala, however, argue that the project would undermine the local industry, resulting in severe implications for the local economy. The harm the hydropower plant will cause to their livelihoods is an element which is most emphasised in the resistance narratives. In fact, the EIA conducted in 2003, flatly states that implementing the project would mean the end of tourism in Kithulgala. Protestors argue that it is grossly unfair to proceed with the project based on an assessment conducted so many years ago, when the conditions have changed so drastically.

Current official records name fifteen registered tourist establishments in the area (Yatinyanthota Divisional Secretariat 2017), though the number of unregistered

businesses is said to be much higher. As Suren notes, “When the EIA was done in 2003 there were only two companies which had invested in white-water rafting. Today there are more than seventy organisations dependent on it!” (Interview with Suren, 24 August 2017). The media reports that, ‘More than 200 people are directly employed by about 10 rafting operators and the business provides another 400-odd indirect jobs, creating the backbone of a livelihood for the Kithulgala villagers’ (Rodrigo 2014). This narrative representing white-water rafting and the tourism industry in Kithulgala as the ‘backbone’ of the community is key to the protest. It claims that any harm to the industry would undoubtedly have consequences for the entire community. This narrative reveals an effort made by the business community to portray the BHP as a ‘shared intolerable’ of all people in Kithulgala.

The white-water rafting community in Kithulgala further reinforces this argument by stressing the importance of their trade to the national economy. Suren estimates that white-water rafting generates revenue close to USD12.5 million annually. He opines that white-water rafting is one of the main attractions for adventure tourists, and that many would travel to Sri Lanka mainly for this water sport. This argument emphasises the importance of Kithulgala to the national economy in a context in which tourism is championed as one of the key drivers of economic growth. They assert that the decline of white-water rafting would have negative implications for the national economy. This is an argument that features importantly in their resistance to the BHP.

These economic concerns are compounded by a question of justice: who benefits from the power plant? As Suren expresses, “It is important that such measures [constructing the hydropower plant] taken by the government should ideally benefit the locals somewhat and not place a further cost on them” (Interview with Suren, 24 August 2017). There is a sense in which the community is asked to bear the cost of the project, while others enjoy the benefits accruing from it. This calls attention to the injustice of undermining local livelihoods, for the benefit of wealthier groups outside the village. Such views also serve to further align the protest with the needs or demands of the community.

Some community members, however, have a different narrative on the centrality of white-water rafting to Kithulgala’s economic life. The most memorable expression comes from Kamal, who lives across the river from the hotels and tourist establishments. We

were told, “White-water rafting and tourism is done by people on that side of the river, along the road. People on this side of the river don’t engage in it. The project won’t have a big impact on our lives” (Interview with Kamal, 17 January 2018). This view is also confirmed in conversation with government bureaucrats who state that the hotels are on ‘this side’ (*megoda*, i.e. along the road) of the river; while the natural resources and natural environment are on the ‘other side’ (*egoda*) of the river. These statements allude to an unequal distribution of the benefits of tourism and white-water rafting in Kithulgala. This third narrative about the economy questions the alleged centrality of white-water rafting to all persons in Kithulgala. It suggests that the benefits of white-water rafting and the growth of the tourism sector in the area may be limited to a few. Yet, this perspective is largely invisible in the narratives surrounding Kithulgala and the place of white-water rafting therein.

The competing narratives about the economy further problematise a dichotomous understanding of power and resistance. Whereas the project seeks to gain legitimacy by representing itself as serving the needs of the entire country; the tourism sector portrays itself as being the economic foundation of Kithulgala, and a key contributor to the national economy. The power and presence of these two narratives make other narratives challenging the distribution of economic benefits of white-water rafting less visible. However, these other narratives play a crucial role in undermining the depiction of the struggle in Kithulgala as being a dichotomous confrontation between the project and the community. It disrupts efforts to represent the project as a ‘shared intolerable’ for those living there.

Narratives of the village

Multiple narratives also emerge when speaking about the ‘village’. The history, the lifestyle and the attractions of the village are framed differently by different stakeholders. These competing narratives offer an interesting image of Kithulgala, and what it means to people living or working there. It is also very clearly driven by how these stakeholders are affected by the hydropower project.

A key narrative used to describe the village is in relation to white-water rafting. Kithulgala has gained renown nationally and internationally for its Class 3 rapids (Jayasinghe 2014). Sunil, the owner of a small white-water rafting business comments, “Sometimes

people don’t know Kithulgala when you refer to it by name. But the moment you mention white-water rafting, they make the connection” (Interview with Sunil, 17 January 2018). Many of those engaged in the white-water rafting business see themselves as crucial in keeping Kithulgala on the map. For example, part of Suren’s resistance to the project stems from his identity as a ‘son of the soil’, someone who ‘was born and bred in Kithulgala’. To him, fighting against the BHP and safeguarding white-water rafting are pivotal to preserving the identity of Kithulgala. He claims that the project does not account for the impact it will have on white-water rafting businesses, even though the EIA states that there would be no water for rafting once the power plant is in operation. “We filed a case at the Supreme Court, and I myself joined [an opposition political party] so that I could oppose the Broadlands Project” (Interview with Suren, 24 August 2017). His view is that white-water rafting is central to Kithulgala, both in terms of its economy, as well as its identity, and his commitment to opposing the project seems to spring from the need to defend his image of the village.

The same narrative is evident among those involved in white-water rafting. They frame their resistance to the project as being representative of the community’s struggle, and this is evident in every response obtained from those engaged in white-water rafting. Sunil says, “It would be best if rafting is continued, not just so that we can earn something out of it, but because it benefits the village” (Interview with Sunil, 17 January 2018). Sunil’s friend Amal, who freelances as a ‘boat-boy’ for larger white-water rafting companies, observes that white-water rafting is central to the local economy and lifestyle of the village, especially among the youth (Interview with Amal, 17 January 2018). While many list the impacts primarily in terms of maintaining economic stability, they also claim that their struggle is directed towards protecting the “essence” of Kithulgala. They argue that the project, by endangering the industry, threatens to destroy the identity of the village and the community.

Others in Kithulgala, however, provide a different perspective of the village that distances the sporting industry from the village. White-water rafting is an activity introduced as recently as 1995 (Rodrigo 2014). Many have memories of the river and the village that do not include the sport. There are a number of perceptions offered by people in Kithulgala that reinforce this distance. First, the ease of income symbolised by the industry serves as a significant pull factor for many

village youth. As a result, they allegedly do not pursue their education, preferring rather to drop out of school and join one of the main rafting businesses to learn the trade. Government bureaucrats note that, while the industry provides jobs for the youth, their lack of education is seen as something that could severely disadvantage them in the future: a negative perception of the impact of white-water rafting on the village.

Second, there is an accusation that the white-water rafting industry has brought what is seen as the undesirable 'Hikkaduwa culture' to Kithulgala. In speaking of this, Ruvan claims that many young people "now grow their hair in funny ways, tattoo themselves, act in ways unsuitable to the village with local and foreign women. The culture of the village has been compromised because of tourism" (Interview with Ruvan, 24 August 2017). A government bureaucrat too notes, "White-water rafting people are living in this area like they would in Hikkaduwa, which is not suitable for our village" (Interview with Government Official, 02 October 2017). The implication here is significant. It seems to position white-water rafting as a culture that taints the image of Kithulgala, undermining the claim that the industry is central to the village's identity. While the local youth find well-paying jobs through the industry, their connection to the village's 'traditional culture' is lost in the eyes of many from the community. Thus, some in the community further distance white-water rafting from the identity of the village.

Third, even among those engaged in white-water rafting, much of the economic benefits brought through the industry are restricted to a small group of people. Our own observations indicate a distinct hierarchy in Kithulgala: many of the larger tourist establishments are owned by people from outside Kithulgala; while the locals are engaged in smaller scale operations and as 'boat boys'. As Ruvan notes, "the businessmen are from Colombo. The profits go to Colombo" (Interview with Ruvan, 24 August 2017). Only one local was named as having profited significantly through white-water rafting. This reflects strongly on the economic distancing of white-water rafting from the village – adding to and exacerbating the negative perception of the industry.

Concerning the BHP, the villagers' narratives clearly seem to position it as an 'outsider'. Apart from its physical presence within the village, it does not seem to have established any notable link with the village, and the people of Kithulgala too do not seem to have a great stake in it. Work at the project site is directed

by engineers and officials commissioned by the CEB in Colombo, and a large majority of the labourers are Chinese. There is some discontent among the community regarding Chinese labourers being given preference over local labourers, and some respondents describe them as "dirty people who don't even have proper toilets" (Personal Communication with elderly community member, 24 August 2017). Thus, the people distance themselves from the project, and the lack of employment or direct benefit to the local community, further reinforces this.

A key feature in many people's narratives about the village is the location where the film *The Bridge on the River Kwai* was shot in 1957. The bridge was constructed and subsequently destroyed as part of the movie through an explosion, and is claimed by residents to be a significant tourist attraction, and very much a part of the identity of the village. Minoli, a resident of Kithulgala, boasted that her husband featured as an extra in the film, and spoke of how she has taken many people to view the remains of the bridge. Construction for the project will affect the film site, and people are deeply upset by this. Although the project promises to rebuild the bridge once construction is completed, some see this as an infringement on their cultural heritage.

Apart from these stories, however, there does not seem to be any major resistance to the hydropower facility being constructed within the village, especially when compared with the response to white-water rafting. As one respondent observed, electricity is important to the development of the whole country, and many people in Kithulgala see the 'development' of the country as a good thing. To ordinary people in Kithulgala, the project seems to be a national development measure that minimally impacts their daily life. In contrast, there is a well-articulated negative image of white-water rafting and a clear distancing of the village's identity from it.

The efforts to frame the 'essence of Kithulgala' underscore an attempt to speak for and represent the views and needs of the entire community. Especially in the light of how the project alters the contours of the village, competing narratives about what is central to Kithulgala's identity complicate the idea that there is one holistic image of the village, and interrogate how representative these narratives are.

Conclusion

At the heart of the issue in Kithulgala is the question of power and resistance. While protest against the establishment of the BHP is evident, this paper has sought to understand why this resistance has not found unanimous support across the community, and what that says about the protest movement. Foucault's notion of a shared intolerable is key to understanding this dilemma in Kithulgala. The protest – led by those involved in white-water rafting – attempts to posit itself as representative of the needs of the entire community.

The attempt to form a collective resistance against the project seems to be centred round three actions. First, it constructs the struggle as a dichotomy, with the protestors – led by the White-Water Rafting Association – being located distinct and in opposition to the project. The protest is symbolised by the question, 'Should it be used for Power or Sports?': a dichotomous relation that draws on the discourses of the economic and environmental impacts of these two concerns.

Second, the protest legitimises its claim of representing the needs of the community by including certain other narratives as part of its discourse. The question of adequate compensation for homes and livelihoods lost as a result of the project is clearly situated within the larger protest. It is directly linked to the needs and concerns of the wider community – those not engaged in white-water rafting or tourism – and including it as a part of the narrative of resistance against the BHP underscores the representative nature of the protest. Thus, the project gains legitimacy in its dichotomisation of the issue, and the community's concerns are assimilated into the 'sports' side of the struggle.

Third, and most crucially, the protest disallows the emergence of any narratives that undermine this dichotomy. Stories of how local level government bureaucrats were afraid to report unhygienic and environmentally harmful practices of some hotels, suggest that there is an indirect threat to any narratives that harm the image presented by the protestors of an environmentally friendly tourism industry in Kithulgala. Furthermore, imaginations of the village before white-water rafting and stories about the lack of equality in the distribution of profits from tourism – issues that question the legitimacy of those engaged in white-water rafting and tourism as representatives of the people's concerns – are excluded from the larger protest movement. These three actions serve to build a movement of resistance that is cohesive and distinct from the power symbolised by the BHP.

The problem inherent in this dichotomy is apparent in laying out these actions. When Foucault argues for a resistance that is diffuse, he also highlights the need for an "absence of hierarchies" within the resistance. For resistance to function as a "counter-power" (Pickett 1996, p. 459), it must resist the inequalities that signify power within its own structure. The protest in Kithulgala veers from this understanding of resistance in its effort to dichotomise the issue. While the concerns of those engaged in white-water rafting and tourism are valid in their own right, the presentation of their struggle as one that is representative of the community's needs is problematic. While they make a case for the project being a shared intolerable in Kithulgala, other less visible narratives contradict this. Whether it is regarding environmental concerns, economic concerns or imaginations of the village, there are muted narratives that question the legitimacy of claiming a collective resistance to a 'shared intolerable'. Rather, these narratives bring to light inequalities between those who engage in white-water rafting and those who do not, belying the positioning of the protest as a collective and representative resistance.

Instead, the protest led by those involved in white-water rafting reveals that it has acquired some features of power. By disallowing certain narratives in Kithulgala to be heard, the protest "structure[s] the possible field of action of others" (Foucault 1982, p. 790), thus taking on the markers of government. In a Foucauldian imagination of resistance, "the diffuse yet unitary nature of power allows for these various agitations across society to finally achieve coherence" (Pickett 1996, p. 456). The notable lack of a shared intolerable, coupled with the actions of the protest movement in cementing their 'representation' of the community, suggests that white-water rafting and tourism in Kithulgala may symbolise power and not resistance. While their opposition to the project is based on concerns that are representative of some groups in Kithulgala, their claim of being leaders of a larger resistance to the project is severely undermined through alternative narratives that emerged in the research. The "ethico-political choice" made by some parts of the community is simply not against the BHP. This belies the claim of the protest of the BHP being a shared intolerable in Kithulgala.

The opposition to the BHP in Kithulgala draws attention to a crucial aspect of studying resistance. In Kithulgala, as in other instances, resistance gains legitimacy by positing itself in direct opposition to the power it is resisting. Yet the actions it employs to gain this legitimacy may embody some of the very

structures of power it is trying to resist. Narratives that are less visible at the ground level call these actions into question. They betray that there may be other contestations at the local level, contestations that are more important to some groups, which undermine

the possibility of collective resistance. Acknowledging the existence of such narratives is vital to exploring the nature of resistance. These less visible narratives facilitate a more holistic reading of power and resistance in practice, as is apparent in Kithulgala.

Notes

- * Rebecca Surenthiraraj and Mark Schubert are researchers at the Social Scientists' Association, Colombo.
- 1 Suren is a local who is now proprietor of a large business based on white-water rafting and has also been involved in party politics for some time. He is one of the petitioners in the case filed against the project. At the

- time, he was a member of a small opposition party.
- 2 Madara is a manager at one of the leading tourist hotels in Kithulgala.
- 3 Ruwan is a local environmentalist who is critical of both white-water rafting and the BHP. At the time, he was an active member of a party in government.

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