

Indigenous Knowledge/Power

by

Arun Agrawal
School of Natural Resources and Environment
University of Michigan
Ann Arbor MI 48109
arunagra@umich.edu

Paper prepared for discussion at the Program in Agrarian Studies, Yale University, New Haven, December 2, 2005.

Indigenous Knowledge/Powerby

Arun Agrawal

Introduction

The vitality of writings on indigenous politics, both when such politics concerns conceptions of indigenous knowledge and when it related to indigenous identity claims, rests ultimately on implicit conceptions of power. But the obvious indebtedness of these writings to particular views of power is matched only by a continuing absence of explicit discussions of power in conversations on indigeneity. Consider the insightful and careful discussions of mētis by Scott (1998), or the role of indigenous knowledge in a new applied anthropology by Sillitoe (1998), or for that matter the vast outpouring of research on indigenous knowledge since the mid 1980s.¹ These works, although political in their own ways, seldom focus on the specific nature of the politics they evoke or invoke. The contrast between a reliance on implicit invocations of politics and power and the absence of explicit elaboration is even more striking in the important works on indigenous identities and rights. Take as an example the impressive collection of papers on indigenous movements in the Americas and Africa that Hodgson (2002) brought together in a recent issue of the *American Anthropologist*. Despite commenting directly on the politics of indigenous rights, none of the papers in the issue develops an argument about the nature and workings of power that each so clearly care about, and which is central to views of politics around indigenous rights that are elaborated in the papers. In general, it

¹ For early works on indigenous knowledge and its referents, see Brokensha et al., 1980 and Warren et al. 1995. For some later sympathetic critiques, see the essays in Ellen et al., 2000.

may be fair to claim that studies of indigeneity inevitably rely on particular ways of thinking about power – even if that particularity tends to remain implicit. More specifically, they seldom attempt systematically to articulate their concern with power with their interest in indigeneity, or dwell much on the implications of different ways of thinking about power in relation to the indigenous.

The issue is both broad and deep. It is useful, therefore, to begin with what seems common to those who write about indigeneity. Studies of indigenous knowledge attempt what might be called a dual redemption. One, they seek to redeem their subject by pointing to how such knowledges exist in a kin relationship with more formal investigations, their relevance to science, to particular utilitarian ends, and potentially even to the interests of those who are not indigenous. In generating an account of a specific form of knowledge, ethnographic descriptions thus provide an implicit justification for the continuation of the lives and livelihoods that generate the forms of knowledge with which the description is concerned. Two, studies of the indigenous seek to prevent its loss through the sheer act of description. They serve this second redemptive task, thus, insofar as the very act of description serves to preserve. Even if the peoples, with whose knowledge a particular description is concerned were to disappear, knowledge about their knowledge, their culture, and their struggles will remain. In each of these two senses, then, indigenous ethnographies can also be viewed as what Clifford has called “allegories of salvage” (1986: 115), and what an earlier generation of anthropologists referred to as “salvage ethnographies” (Gruber 1970).

The notion of salvage is central to writings about the indigenous and indigeneity because of their concern with marginality, loss, and value. Folk taxonomies, studies of specific people's relations with their plants and animals, and investigations of changing cultural practices are necessary because of the potential loss of information were such studies not carried out, or even were they to be delayed. In common with much work on peasants, pastoralists, and hunter gatherers – those damned by history -- writings on indigenous knowledges and peoples see the subject of their interest as always, even already, disappearing.

Questions related to marginality, loss, value, and salvage are all intimately concerned with power; often with the very mundane but important questions of how power is exercised, who exercises it, and its role in social change. But answers to these questions about how power is exercised and so forth are critically tied to second order questions about how to think about power and the effects it produces. In delving into how different ways of thinking about power shape particular conceptions of the indigenous and indigeneity, I begin by talking briefly about a particular case of mobility and dislocation: one concerning developmental interventions in the lives of migrant pastoralists, an intervention that depended on particular conceptions of indigenous or local knowledge and its efficacy. My main objective in using this example is to highlight its resonance with other studies of marginality and displacement of indigenous peoples. The examination of parallels across several studies prepares the ground to open a discussion of ideas about power, how these ideas can be brought to bear upon discussions

of indigeneity and indigenous knowledge, and some necessary reconceptualizations of the relationship between agency and power.

Indigenous Knowledge: A Puzzle

A paradox, or at least an apparent puzzle, goes to the heart of justifications about the study of indigenous or local knowledges. Such studies are seen to be necessary because the subjects of such research are under threat, indeed slowly disappearing. Much research on the subject presents an antagonistic relationship between development in its many different guises and the interests of indigenous peoples (Kramer, Van Schaik, and Johnson, 1997: 3-14; Terborgh 1999: 46). This antagonistic relationship – where development processes produce changes hostile to the forces and structures that permit the indigenous to survive, is seen to be true of market-led developmental changes (Painter and Durham, 1995), as well as situations where nation-states initiate programs of development (Behnke, Scoones, and Kerven, 1993; Peters 1994). Social, economic, and ecological challenges that confront indigenous peoples are, in this view, a result of inexorable capitalist, market expansion, and also externally imposed political, social, legal, and economic structures.² Market expansion can make existing production strategies of indigenous peoples useless, their cosmologies irrelevant, and their politics

² See for example, the collection of essays in Redford and Padoch, 1992.

marginal.³ More powerful, better off, and wealthier groups are typically also seen as better able to appropriate the opportunities and resources that government interventions create. Indigenous knowledges and economic strategies may be highly valuable in setting where markets and states are absent (Richards 1985, Posey 1993). But as indigenous peoples are isolated from new economic opportunities and as their older livelihood strategies become less viable, their knowledge is threatened with obsolescence and irrelevance (Oates, 1999; Behrens 1989).⁴

The necessity of research on indigenous knowledge is coupled with urgency because of the rate at which archivists and observers of indigenous knowledges perceive their subject of interest to be disappearing. Modernization, industrialization, dislocation, economic growth and associated phenomena are not only leading to a decline in the prospects of indigenous groups and their knowledges, they are bringing it about at an accelerating pace (Wickramsinghe 1997). Under some conditions, indigenous people's knowledge about their environments can grow (Godoy et al., 1998). But overall, social transformations inimical to the interests of indigenous peoples and their knowledges may be hard to arrest as globalization and market penetration proceed apace; hence if this knowledge is not documented and the descriptions of indigenous peoples not recorded

³ Indeed, in an interesting twist on arguments about external interventions, Berlin and Berlin 2004 suggest that even NGOs may be able to deprive indigenous communities of their autonomy as they oppose globalization-related processes.

⁴ The terms in which I depict a larger literature may appear a caricature of the relationship between the interests of the indigenous/local and those of non-indigenous/non-local, at best a schematic representation. But the structural opposition I describe is surely discernible in much of the scholarship on the relationship between locality and globalization, communities and the state, tradition and modernity, and so forth. For an examination of some of these tendencies and some caveats in relation to them, see the essays in Li 1999 and Moore et al. 2003. For critical discussions and some evidence against such arguments, see Henrich 1997, Greene 2004, and Holt 2005.

now, the opportunity may be lost forever. Research into such peoples and their knowledges should, therefore, be carried out sooner rather than later.

Additionally, research on indigenous knowledge and peoples work gains importance because of the potential value of the knowledge that is under threat. Such knowledge can be useful both for indigenous peoples themselves and for others. It can be useful for the indigenous peoples if they gained greater, more secure, and more certain access to land and productive resources – they could then deploy their knowledge in conservative and sustainable management practices (Bodley, 1990; Redford, 1991). It is also useful to others because it can improve the chances of success of development interventions, help in creating more widely available medicines and cures, and facilitate better management of environmental resources.

The necessity, urgency, and importance of conducting research on indigeneity raises a host of philosophical, epistemological, and ontological issues to which its scholars have attended since the beginnings of their inter-discipline. These include questions about whether indigenous knowledge is really “old,” customary, or traditional knowledge, the extent to which it exists in pure or mixed forms, how it might be central to development and progressive social change, its relevance to science, its scientific validity, and so forth. These issues are closely tied to the central theme of my paper: how to think about power in relation to indigeneity in a way that is internally consistent, and equally importantly, consistent with some recent acute observations on the ways in which indigeneity and locality come to terms with their other--that is to say, in a way that opens

up a space for talking about change through those often presumed to be the victims of modernity, but equally often claimed as actors and agents who rework it.

To illustrate what I have in mind by consistency, I turn now to an apparent puzzle in writings on indigenous knowledge. The necessity, urgency, and importance of research on indigeneity derives from assumptions that such knowledge is disappearing, the rate of disappearance is fast and possibly accelerating, and that such knowledge is valuable. But the value one is talking about is quite specific – it is useful in improving scientific knowledge, it can test true on criteria that western scientists recognize as valid, it can lead to products and technology that are useful in modernity, and thereby provide for a group of less powerful peoples a stronger foundation to engage developmental processes and pursue development. But this is less than compelling – because it is development that to begin with threatens indigenous knowledges. The progressive spread of science and scientific knowledge threatens the ways indigenous cosmologies and knowledge work, according to those who see indigenous knowledge systems under threat as a result of what Weber would have seen as the disenchantment of the world. The spread of what threatens indigenous knowledge is also, thus, precisely what many advocates of indigenous knowledge seek to advance by identifying, documenting, collecting, and systematizing indigenous knowledges. This apparent paradox can at least be understood better, if not addressed, by paying greater attention to the nature of power, and how very particular interpretations of power implicitly underpin studies of the relationship between indigenous knowledge and processes related to modernity and change.

The Raika Shepherds of Rajasthan

To ground the ensuing discussion of power and its relevance of indigenous knowledge, a specific description of displacement and dislocation among the raikas shepherds of India is instructive.⁵ It is a telling example both because of what it illustrates of the relationship between external interventions premised on scientific understandings of production systems and their outcomes, and the characteristically unanticipated ways in which such interventions unfold. The raikas, among whom I studied in the early 1990s, inhabit the western states of Rajasthan and Gujarat in India, and migrate as collectives anywhere between 3 to 9 months in the year.⁶ Their mobility allows them to enhance levels of agro-pastoral production by taking advantage of spatio-temporal variations in forage production across territorial units, and depends on their knowledge about variations in forage along the way, the suitability of different species of grasses and plants as food and medicines for sheep, and their finely tuned information collection systems about rainfall patterns and the production response to rainfall at different times and in different places along their migration routes. It also depends on their ability to enact and perform a series of exchange relationships with farmers, wool shearers, merchants, and petty commodity producers. In this sense, collective migrations are an adaptation to a hostile social and ecological environment, founded on the knowledge that becomes available to successive generation of shepherds as a result of participation in mobility. Certainly, the elimination of mobility as a strategy in the repertoire that helps deal with production fluctuations

⁵ I use the example of the raika shepherds both because of my personal knowledge of their story, but also because of the familiarity of the plotline. For similar stories from other contexts and regions, see Galaty and Johnson, 1990; and Hedlund, 1971.

⁶ For an interesting discussion of mobility and territoriality, see Cashdan 1983.

without technological and institutional changes that compensate for production losses would reduce the economic surplus available to those forced to settle.

However, the mobility of pastoralists has conventionally been viewed by many state actors and international donors committed to development as an irrational response to environmental constraints, modernization, and market forces. These official understandings of mobility led the government of Rajasthan, with the help of funds from the World Bank, to launch the Sheep and Pasture Development Program in the early 1970s. This program aimed to convert village common lands into 100 hectare enclosed plots of pastures; establish cooperatives of shepherds that would graze their flocks in these enclosed pastures, increase the utilization of rainwater for pasture development, check soil erosion, maintain fertility, reduce or prevent animal migration, and improve the quality of wool and mutton that reached the market. To meet these objectives, the Program officials created formed nearly 2,500 raika households into 49 cooperative societies, for each of which they fenced 1 plot. Members of the cooperative society contributed capital in the form of ewes. The government hoped that after two or three annual rain cycles, the shepherds would witness the greater wool and mutton productivity of sheep on the pasture plots compared to those in migrating flocks and the positive lessons of sedentarized living would compel not only the cooperativized shepherds to choose a life of settled comfort, but also persuade others to follow the enlightened example of their settled brethren. The experiment could then be declared a success by handing over the operational management of the pasture plots to the cooperative societies.

The program produced many effects – but as the astute reader will guess – few that conformed to plan. The enclosed plots had been carved out of the common lands on which village animals grazed – effectively, it reduced the fodder available for grazing. Program officials sowed new grass in the enclosed plots that was available only to the sheep belonging to cooperative members. They also sowed the seeds of some dissent among those belonging to the cooperative and those outside it. More importantly, after fifteen years of intensive, expensive efforts at proselytization, the program had not managed to persuade shepherds to settle. Nor were the cooperative societies financially viable. Each society earned approximately 2000 rupees annually (approximately ½ million rupees for the 49 societies). But salaries of government officials were more than a million rupees annually. And none of the cooperative societies received any pasture plots to manage.

Shepherds and government officials advanced very different stories as to what was happening in the project. For program officials, the fault lay with the shepherds and weather. Rains failed for several consecutive years after the program was launched; but the shepherds had provided unproductive land for the pasture plots, non-member shepherds had broken the fence around the plots, village animals competed with those within the pastures for the available forage, the grasses sown in the enclosed pastures could not establish themselves owing to the high grazing pressure; funding uncertainties had prevented many shepherds from joining the program... the list went on.

For the shepherds, the program made little sense. It provided access to those who had sheep to spare. Those who had fewer sheep were denied government largesse and did

not feel the need to cooperate -- their sheep “encroached” on the enclosed pasture. Many villagers, incensed by the enclosures that sought to overturn viable existing grazing practices, stole and sold the barbed wire that marked the boundaries of the plot. Some of them used the identity papers supplied to them as members of the program to buttress their applications for ration cards as village residents and as voters in elections. Despite the many difficulties and failures that were encountered, many government officials expressed the hope that had the program been continued, it would have been successful (from their point of view). Ultimately, the program was shut down just before 1990.

Examples of sedentarization programs have been interpreted in radically different ways. Similar program in other locations have often been credited with creating greater misery and no few ill effects for those subjected to the program (Cole, 2003; Little, 1985; Little et al., 2001; Niamir-Fuller 1999; but see also Fratkin, 1992; 1997). Even in the case of the shepherds, one can easily point to the dislocations in the lives of some of the shepherds as the program enclosed a significant part of grazing commons in several villages, took animals out of the migration process, and created new mechanisms of surveillance and state presence in the midst of raikas’ lives. The attempt to sedentarize them, to the extent it was successful, made them less able to withstand seasonal and annual variations in rainfall and fodder availability. It institutionalized exclusionary and standardizing impositions – thereby contributing to what Foucault has referred to as a “double repression.” Imposing certain standards of behavior on those it included, it simultaneously encouraged changes in the actions of those who were excluded – through

a willingness to conform to selection criteria, even those who were excluded could become part of the program.

But there are other ways as well to understand what happened. Indeed, the vignette above turns on the ability of the shepherds to bring about the failure of the program. By refusing to cooperate with the processes the program sought to institutionalize, the shepherds defended their lifestyles and showed that they had the power to undermine externally imposed solutions. They evaded the double repression of which Foucault speaks by sidestepping and evading the criteria of inclusion, and dodging the standards of conformity. What seems more striking about the intervention is mostly its failure to bring about desired outcomes, rather than its ability to turn the shepherds into handmaidens of a blueprint for development. During my fieldwork among the shepherds at the end of more than a decade of efforts to create modern, settled Indian citizens, nothing much seemed to have been accomplished by the development program – negative or positive.

Indeed, one can point to some unintended consequences of the cooperative societies that the government had encouraged. These societies, in the democratic framework of elections and political competition, had ended up favoring the overall interests of the shepherds. Members of the 49 societies constituted the core of a federation of shepherd societies that had emerged to lobby state level politicians. The federation numbered more than 25,000 -- far more than the 2,500 or so shepherds that had been brought together as members of the different cooperative societies. The success of the federation in mobilizing a large number of shepherds to band together was in part

attributable to the assertive tone in which it articulated long felt needs of the shepherds – rights of passage during their migration, against harassment by government officials, provision of healthcare and education for children, and access to drinking water for sheep. In part, the success of the organization was attributable to the tireless efforts of its leader – Bhopalaram Dewasi.

Bhopalaram regularly met with members of the state legislature and mid-level officials in the state bureaucracy to communicate the complaints and concerns of shepherds. His own story mirrored in some ways the rise of the shepherds' federation. The owner of a relatively small herd in the early 1970s, he had become a member of one of the cooperative societies and contributed all his sheep as shares in the society in the early stages of the Sheep and Pasture Development Program. Soon after he joined the project in 1978, however, he lost nearly all his sheep when the rains failed in 1979, and then again in 1982. With this debacle, he lost all appetite for herding sheep. Instead, he turned to itinerant trade in veterinary medicines, selling them to shepherds in migrating camps all over the states of Rajasthan and Haryana. As his interactions with different shepherd camps and his knowledge about their problems grew, he struck upon the “novel” idea of lobbying government officials and politicians to pay attention to these problems. The shepherds quickly elected as the leader of the shepherds' federation in 1988 – after three years rainfall failure in Rajasthan. He brought the same energy to that position as he had to his business of selling medicines and feed to migrating shepherds. When I met him in 1990 during the course of my fieldwork, he was widely respected and admired among the different shepherd camps, even loved a little.

If the shepherds can clearly be cast as marginal, powerful only by virtue of their foot-dragging behavior in interactions with officials of the Sheep and Pasture Development Societies, they emerge as capable in their unity to lobby government officials and state politicians more widely. Their lobbying strength is related closely to the credibility of shepherds' promises to cast their votes as a bloc in local elections. It is also traceable in complex ways to steps that the government itself initiated to develop them – even if a politicized organization of shepherds was the last thing government officials involved in the Pasture project would have thought of when thinking of development. Even more interesting is the story of Bhopalaramji. He lost nearly all his sheep in 1982, but by 1990 had emerged as an articulate and engaged leader of the only formally organized collective of the shepherds. The shepherds I met often commented on how he was barely recognizable as the same person, so significant was his transformation between the late 1970s to the mid 1980s.

These various interpretations of state interventions and their effects can be multiplied by referring to other local/indigenous peoples, and efforts to modernize or develop them, or in discussing transformations that make other individuals anew. My intention, however, is less to provide resonating accounts, or lay to rest differences in interpretations of state interventions by arguing for the correctness of one over the other, nor for that matter to effect a resolution or a synthesis that would make different resolutions agree by pointing to some larger truth about the lives of those subject to state development policies. Instead, I suggest, it is useful to point to how different interpretations of power work in the attempts at sense-making encouraged by competing

versions of state interventions and stories of transformations of particular subjects. Indeed, that is perhaps the core question motivating this paper – how do different ways of thinking about power help produce sense out of the relationship between power and its effects, including the effect of subjectivity(ies). Varying, and perhaps complementary understandings of power and politics, are implicit in the above account about the shepherds. Making them explicit requires the staging of these different ways of thinking about power, and articulating them with alternative ways of thinking about agency, capacity, and knowledge. Attempting such articulations also allows one to pose questions about some basic tensions and ambiguities involved.

Power and its Subjects

The most common understandings of power in political science, and perhaps more broadly in the social sciences, approach it with familiar references to the “three faces of power,” where faces of power signifies an agent-centered view. Such understandings of power begin from a concern about whether power is no more than the ability of those more powerful to produce observable effects on those less powerful, and move towards a conclusion that power may be most effective when it prevents the less powerful even from recognizing that they are subject to power. Even if the opening versions of what it means for power to work are wedded to a behavioral and empiricist social science, and the latter almost metaphysical in their beliefs about the existence of power, the difference among these ways of thinking about power ultimately turns on observeability. They share, nonetheless, a significant common ground: power is relational, exercised by agents

and therefore subjectival, and in being the antithesis of freedom, negative.⁷ These accounts of what it means to exercise power and their implications for how one conceptualizes domination and resistance have also been suitably criticized.⁸ But they continue importantly to shape at least some aspects of how power is commonly and popularly understood: Power is at work when subjects are not free.

Other accounts of power focus less on the specific subjects directly involved in an interaction, more on the contextual, and social-structural features of the context within which power relationships unfold. Central to these structuralist reworkings of power is the relationship between structure and agency, and the extent to which any analysis of the power relation between two agents and a given phenomenon must take into account other agents, other social roles, other events and processes, and larger social phenomena such as institutions, norms, and cultural understandings. In regards to the workings of power, the claims and contributions of this second set of writings focus on the important role of other social agents, social relationships, and background norms and institutions. In short, the antecedent and attendant conditions within which any specific political relationship exists.

⁷ The literature on the three faces of power has been summarized ably by a number of scholars, often with their own important contributions. See especially, Clegg, 1989; Hayward 2000; and Lukes, 1986; 2005.

⁸ Consider Geertz and Taylor as examples. According to Geertz (1995), “to depict power as some sort of featureless, universal force producing an abstract invariant relationship called ‘domination’ is to block perception of both the texture of politics and its reach, and leaves us with hardly anything to say but that big fish eat little ones, the weak fo to the wall, power tends to corrupt, uneasy lies the head, and master and man need one another to exist: the dim banalities of theory.” And Taylor (1984) believes that, the workings of power “absolutely do not admit of being described in such a homogeneous medium of culturally neutral makings and doings. The power of the audience over the star craving approval is utterly incommensurable with the power of the general, which is incommensurable with the power of the elected minister, and that in turn with the power of the guru and so on.”

Structuralists' claims about power, thus, would suggest that the ability of government officials to exercise power over the shepherds was in part a consequence of their relationships with other government officials in an administrative hierarchy and with local elite in the social hierarchy. In addition, it concerned the specific roles that shepherds and government officials occupied in their respective subject positions, and because of the structures of expectations that both sets of actors brought to bear on their interactions – expectations that were in turn related to the norms and institutions within which these two sets of agents were embedded. An alternative set of structural conditions can similarly be invoked to account for the ability of shepherds to effect some pressure on politicians' decisionmaking as a result of becoming a collective with the visible face of Bhopalaram who was entrusted with the task of lobbying elected representatives. Both for structuralists and for those interested more in highlighting the abilities of agents, despite important differences in how they treat observability, efficacy of agents, intentions, and moral responsibility, what is common is the core idea of power as a relationship between individuals subjects (even if embedded in structures of sociality and expectations), and as the antithesis of freedom. These frameworks are less useful in shedding light on the production of subjectivities as specific effects of power, variations in experiences of power by given subjects, or even variations and changes in the effectiveness of different subjects across experiences and over time.

A third set of understandings informing the nature of power stem from Foucault's work and can be refracted through the distinction between "power to" and "power over."⁹

⁹ The discussion in this and the next paragraph borrows heavily from Patton 1989.

“Power over” is necessarily relational while “power to” may often be self-directed. Nonetheless, they are a related pair. Even if “power to” is empirically and logically prior to “power over,” in concrete instances, they may exist in a complementary relationship. Clearly, improvements in “power to” can facilitate “power over,” but the reverse is also possible. Domination is less to be confused with “power over,” more to be viewed as a particular and systematic effect of some forms of actions over others. Two features of this view -- power does not just constrain but also enables,¹⁰ and is exercised upon actions through actions and fields of forces – are important for the ensuing discussion.

In this approach, power is not antithetical to freedom but its condition. This is broadly because freedom can be realized in two ways: through the removal of positive or negative constraints. Positive constraints are internal to a subject – they can prevent self-realization. Overcoming internal constraints that exist upon an individual’s ability to act irrespective of external constraints is an exercise of power that helps constitute the subject more fully. Negative constraints are external and their removal expands the subject’s ability to act. Power enables particular strategies to come into being, both in the sense of allowing some subjects to overcome constraints to their self-understanding and thereby realizing themselves; and in the sense of allowing particular strategies to influence the enactment of other strategies. In the first sense, power does not constrain but makes the self. Power in the sense of the ability to achieve something in the personal realm is also freedom in the sense of overcoming positive constraints to action. In

¹⁰ In this context, it is worth noting that Sahlins relies on a misreading of Foucault’s views about power when he claims that they are entirely a part of that western heritage whereby power is no more than the capacity to do oneself good or harm (2000: 407). Other misreadings of Foucault’s views similarly depend on attributing to him the view of power as a negative constraint on freedom. See the insightful exchange between Patton 1989 and Taylor 1984.

specific actions that subjects undertake, they may simultaneously be overcoming both these types of constraints – the experience of success in dealing with external or negative constraints to freedom may also importantly help overcome internal or positive constraints. But it is important to note that the distinction between these types of constraints upon and uses of power is a useful way to interpret Foucault’s observations on the enabling properties of power.

In relation to the interactions between the different kinds of strategies of shepherds, government officials, and elected representatives that the above example outlines, it is easy to find echoes of agent-centered and structuralist accounts of power. Typically, such accounts of social struggles as those between state officials and local/indigenous peoples, or those between marginal and other social groups depend upon social-categorical classifications as embodiments of particular interests.¹¹ For all practical analytical purposes, the multiplicity of members within that category – each with potentially distinct potentials, interests, and strategies receives short shrift. Indeed, my own account above of the shepherds and their experiences with the state and development projects is not different. The triad of shepherds/ government officials/ politicians constitutes a particular simplifying optic to impose sense on the many interactions leading to particular social outcomes: failure of the Pasture project, success of the lobbying by shepherds, emergence of Bhopalaram as the federation leader. Peripheral agents such as the World Bank, non-participating shepherds, other villagers,

¹¹ The strategy, often in play as a shorthand, is common to scholars belonging to fields as different in their assumptions as cultural anthropologists and rational-choice political scientists. See Bates (1981) and Bates, Figueredo, and Weingast (1998) as rational-choice exemplars of this strategy and Ferguson (1994 [1990]) and Gupta (1998) as counterpart examples from cultural anthropology.

and the background expectations associated with the roles of these bit-players contributed as well to the production of sense in the story.

However, these observations above ignore two important facets of the workings of power, precisely the ones Foucault's work underscores: the ways shepherds experienced efforts by government officials to establish the Sheep and Pasture Development Program and the uses to which they put the program in their later efforts, and the fractured or disjointed nature of these strategies and experiences. The change in shepherds from being located as asymmetric and ineffective partners in their engagements with government officials to being able to talk to elected representatives about withholding their voting strength is substantial. The change in Bhopalaram's position as someone who had lost his sheep and was near bankrupt, to being the leader of the shepherds' federation is of an order that he was "barely recognizable" to those who knew him before he became a member of his village's cooperative society. Many similar stories of transformations in individual and group fortunes are familiar, so it is perhaps unnecessary to belabor the narrative of transformative experiences and apparent disjunctures in the lived reality of particular subjects. But rather than direct attention toward a closer engagement with these aspects of the shepherds and Bhopalaram's stories, the views of power embedded in my narrative, indeed in most narratives built around oppositions related to marginality, loss, value, and salvage, deflect interest from a fractured view of subject positions, interests, and identities. They portray subjectivity as the source rather than the effect of power, and experiences of different actors as smoothly continuous over time rather than unfolding discontinuously. But highlighting the quite

different experiences of the shepherds and of Bhopalaram forces a different set of questions to intrude upon analysis – who are these shepherds that experience marginalization in some conjunctures of events and press upon elected political representatives in other situations? Is the Bhopalaram who lost his sheep in the early 1980s as a result of a miscalculation, unfortunate turn of events, and an ill-conceived development program among other things, the same person who came to lead the shepherds in the late 1980s?

Articulating Power and Indigeneity

Instead of a preoccupation with the truth content of particular narrative claims about indigeneity or marginality and what is happening to indigenous knowledges and peoples, the argument above tends toward the suggestion that it is important as well to examine how implicit concepts of power enable particular ways of making sense of narratives about indigeneity and marginality, subjectivity and power. It is important to examine the homology across conceptions of power and their relationship to particular narrative strategies, even if ultimately only as a way to understand what is being brushed aside. The two aspects of power that Foucauldian approaches foreground – actions acting upon actions in different fields of forces, and strategies helping constitute the subject – are crucial to understand the concrete instances of how indigeneity and power articulate. Indeed, accounts of indigenous knowledges and peoples that highlight agency and aim at recuperation need to appeal to Foucauldian views of power even when they suggest that it is the same putative agents are able to realize different outcomes. Without recourse to

such understandings of power, they ironically must depend on a far more structuralist explanation of outcomes favorable to subjects who had found themselves on the losing end of earlier engagements with more powerful agents. If in later encounters the agents involved are the same as those from an earlier set of experiences, then it is differences in structural conditions within which new outcomes emerged (not in the agency of their subjects) that explain the favorable outcomes.

Indeed, an implicit assumption about a continuous, singular subjectivity -- invariant in its journeys across different fields of experiences -- unites much recuperationist scholarship on indigeneity and locality. For the most part, writings on indigeneity and marginality treat the subjectivity of their subjects as untouched by the exercise of power. This is true often even of those who acknowledge an explicit debt to Foucault, but certainly of those who are wedded to a more agency-oriented or structuralist conception of power. Thus, whether it is Pigg (1992) reflecting on the appropriations of development discourses in Nepal, Li (2000) talking about the positioning of identities by different tribal groups in Indonesia, Colchester (2005) celebrating indigenous people's power, or Curry (2003) analyzing how indigenous alternatives to postdevelopment might emerge, the subjectivity of indigenous peoples seems to be that "pristine space outside power" which Li (2005: 385) accuses Scott (1998) of trying to locate.

According to Foucault (1977: 98), "One of the prime effects of power [is] that certain bodies, certain gestures, certain discourses, certain desires come to be identified and constituted as individuals." To the extent power also produces subjects -- both

through the constitution of particular sets of gestures and so forth is the “individual effect” but also through the elimination of various constraints to freedom, the assumption of a singular subjectivity intent on achieving a consistent set of interests is difficult to sustain.¹² But it would be fair to say that the very terms in which a subject, a community, a group is presented in discussions on indigeneity further the effects of singularity. What else could a life or a community be but that: a life, a community? Language used to present a subject betrays the propensity to think of subjectivity as a flowing, continuous, uninterrupted stream of experiences that cannot be separated from each other, and equally importantly, from which the subject cannot be separated either. The seamlessness of these experiences depends upon the invisibility of the joints that connect one year to the next, one day to the following after the disjuncture of rest, one moment to the other without a stop. But if every life is in fact a collection of experiences that are shaped in their lived reality by an array of forces, then the nature of these experiences cannot but be subject to potential disruptions and instabilities. In the travel from one movement to another, one day to the next, the possibilities of what may happen are in fact endless.

Of course, the overwhelming probability is that today a given life will be no different from that yesterday. The approximate knowledge and awareness of this overwhelmingness allows any particular subject conveniently to gloss the joints of life, referring to them collectively as “I” or “me.” But a view of the self as potentially distinct across these different fields of forces that each constitute an experience at least permits

¹² See also Foucault 1981 and 1982 for some more extended reflections on what power is not, and by implication, what it might be. Foucault (2005 especially focuses on the singularity of the event, and the forms of experience that tie the subject to truth – but in an effort to show the conditions under which knowledge of the truth through experience can only be apprehended upon condition of the transformation of the subject.

the conceptualization of agents who change in their capacities as a result of the positive or negative effects of power through and in their experiences. The removal of internal constraints or the realization of greater ability to act in any situated experience produces new agents (or for that matter collectives) that bring to their future experiences all the remembered history of older experiences. Memory, through remembered history thus accounts for the trace of continuity across experiences. Even if individual performances during new experiences are no more than variations on a theme, such variations can be viewed as the expressions of a distinctness, distinction if you will, that must concern any theory of agentic power, and which potentially can account for altered outcomes rather than variations in the fields of forces within which all strategies reach their denouement.

Describing the emergence of a sense of place among members of the Kanak in New Caledonia in south Pacific, Clifford (2001) points to the several questions the example raises about the relationships between indigeneity and place, edge and center, and the specificity of particular indigenous experiences and the generality of postcolonial discourses and identities. To understand these different relationships better he draws on Hall (1986) to advance the concept of “indigenous articulations.” Articulation attends to the diversity and specificity of cultures and histories that go by the name of indigenous. Its strength is that it allows movement away from rigid notions about what constitutes oppositional interests and politics in favor of greater attention to the contingencies involved in crafting new grounds for collective visions and struggles. This move simultaneously opens up questions about authenticity, highlights the need for specificity

in generalist criticisms of monolithic categories such as the indigenous or the scientific, and directs attention toward the processes that help constitute such categories.

Its weakness, as Clifford confesses, is that when pushed to its logical extreme, the idea of articulation flails upon the shoals of radical contingency and fluidity in the creation of coalitions and alliances. Ignoring the effects of sedimented histories and localized place experiences, and the mechanisms through which this sedimentation can exert its force across different encounters of contingences runs the risk of reducing the innovative interventions of Foucault and others to a kind of emasculated structuralism. If what matters in different encounters of strategies located in specific fields of forces are the particulars of the strategies and the forces alone, once again the notion of agency and subjectivity dissolves into nothingness. With this dissolution, what is left to analysis are the specific experiences that constitute a subject, the type and combinations of forces involved are what give meaning to an experience, not the authorizing strength of the subject. The structuring power of the context, and thereby the structuralist vision of power remain the only basis for investigation.

It may be fair to suggest that this weakness in the idea of articulation stems from inadequate attention to the positive effects of strategies of power upon subjects that are always at play in different conjunctures and articulations. Not all articulations are possible.¹³ The shepherds in my example did not try to create alliances with government officials in charge of implementing the sheep and wool development program. Their strategies to win legislative victories did not intersect with their strategies to extract more

¹³As Althusser puts it (Casarino 2002: 150), necessity exists “as the becoming necessary of the encounter of contingencies.” But even this becoming necessary, to be intelligible, requires an investigation of the conditions of possibility for contingent encounters that are possible.

fodder from the enclosed pasture plots. Locality and history are all very well, but which aspects of local affiliations or historical experiences matter depends upon how power worked to change the subjects upon which it acted. Only through greater attention to the positive ways in which strategies of power unfold and remake their subjects during the indigenous articulations of which Clifford speaks, will it become possible to talk consistently about the subjectivity of the indigenous and the processes through which such subjectivity is produced.

Acknowledgments:

I gratefully acknowledge assistance from Michael Hathaway in researching several arguments in this paper. Rebecca Hardin's thoughts helped clarify and close some important ambiguities in my thinking. Members of the audience at the International Society for Ethnobiology, for which I prepared the initial draft of this paper, asked perceptive questions that helped me press forward with several of the paper's claims.

Bibliography

Bates, Robert H. 1981. *Markets and States in Tropical Africa*. Los Angeles: University of California Press.

Bates Robert H., Rui Figueiredo, and Barry R. Weingast. 1998. The politics of interpretation: Rationality, culture, and transition. *Politics and Society* 26(4): 603-642.

Behnke, Roy H. Jr., Ian Scoones, and Carol Kerven (eds). 1993. *Range Ecology at Disequilibrium: Pastoral Adaptation in African Savannas*. London: ODI, IIED, and Commonwealth.

Behrens, C. A. 1989. The scientific basis for Shipibo soil classification and land use: Changes in soil-plant association with cash cropping. *American Anthropologist* 91(1): 83-100.

Berlin, B., and E. A. Berlin. 2004. Community autonomy and the Maya ICBG project in Chiapas, Mexico: How a bioprospecting project that should have succeeded failed. *Human Organization* 63(4): 472-86.

Bodley, J. H. 1990. *Victims of Progress*. Mountain View: Mayfield Publishing.

Brokensha, D., D. M. Warren, and O. Werner (eds). 1980. *Indigenous Knowledge Systems and Development*. Washington DC: University Press of America.

Cashdan, Elizabeth A. 1983. Territoriality among human foragers: Ecological models and an application to four Bushmen groups. *Current Anthropology* 24(1): 47-66.

Casarino, Cesare. 2002. *Modernity at Sea: Melville, Marx, Conrad in Crisis*, Minneapolis, University of Minnesota Press.

Clegg, Stewart. 1989. *Frameworks of Power*. London: Sage Publications.

Clifford, James. 1986. On ethnographic allegory. In *Writing Culture: The Poetics and Politics of Ethnography*. Eds. James Clifford and George Marcus. Pp. 98-121. Berkeley: University of California Press.

Clifford, James. 2001. Indigenous articulation. *Contemporary Pacific* 13(2): 468-90.

Colchester, Marcus. 2005. Indigenous people's power: Global mobilization scores dramatic gains -- with many challenges ahead. *Multinational Monitor* 26(7-8): 1-4.

- Curry, George N. 2003. Moving beyond postdevelopment: Facilitating indigenous alternatives for development. *Economic Geography* 79(4): 405-23.
- Ellen, Roy, Peter Parkes, and Alan Bicker (eds). 2000. *Indigenous Environmental Knowledge and its Transformations: Critical Anthropological Perspectives*. Amsterdam: Harwood Academic.
- Ferguson, James [1990] 1994. *The Anti-Politics Machine: "Development," Depoliticization, and Bureaucratic Power in Lesotho*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.
- Foucault, Michel. 1977. *Power/Knowledge: Selected Interviews and Other Writings, 1972-77*. Ed. Colin Gordon.
- Foucault, Michel. 1981. The political technology of individuals. In Luther H. Martin, Huck Gutman, and Patrick H. Hutton (eds.) *Technologies of the Self: A Seminar with Michel Foucault*. pp. 145-62. Amherst: The University of Massachusetts Press.
- Foucault, Michel. 1982. Afterword: The Subject and Power. In Hubert L. Dreyfus and Paul Rabinow. eds. *Michel Foucault: Beyond Structuralism and Hermeneutics*. pp. 208-26. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press.
- Foucault, Michel. 2005 *The Hermeneutics of the Subject: Lectures at the Collège de France, 1981-82*. New York: Palgrave MacMillan.
- Fratkin, Elliott. 1992. Drought and development in Marsabit district, Kenya. *Disasters* 16 (2): 119-30.
- Fratkin, Elliott. 1997. Pastoralism: Governance and development issues. *Annual Review of Anthropology* 26: 235-61.
- Galaty, John G. and Douglas L. Johnson (eds) 1990. *The World of Pastoralism: Herding Systems in Comparative Perspective*. New York: The Guilford Press.
- Geertz, Clifford. 1995. *After the Fact: Four Decades, Two Countries, One Anthropologist*, Harvard University Press.
- Godoy, R., Brokaw, N., and Wilkie D. 1998. Of trade and cognition: Markets and the loss of folk knowledge among the Tawahka Indians of the Honduran rain forest. *Journal of Anthropological Research* 54(2): 219-33.
- Gruber, J. W. 1970. Ethnographic salvage and the shaping of Anthropology. *American Anthropologist* 72(6): 1289-99.

- Gupta, Akhil. 1998. *Postcolonial Developments: Agriculture in the Making of Modern India*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press.
- Hayward, Clarissa Rile. 2000. *Defacing Power*. New York: Cambridge University Press.
- Hedlund, H. 1971. The impact of group ranches on a pastoral society. Institute of Development Studies Paper # 100. Nairobi: University of Nairobi.
- Henrich J. 1997. Market incorporation, agricultural change, and sustainability among the Machigueuga Indians of the Peruvian Amazon. *Human Ecology* 25(2): 319-51.
- Hodgson, Dorothy L. 2002. Precarious alliances: The cultural politics and structural predicaments of the indigenous rights movement in Tanzania. *Current Anthropology* 104 (4): 1086-97.
- Holt, Flora L. 2005. The Catch-22 of conservation: Indigenous peoples, biologists, and cultural change. *Human Ecology* 33(2): 199-215.
- Kramer, R. A., C. P. van Schaik, and J. Johnson. 1997. *Last Stand: Protected Areas and the Defense of Tropical Biodiversity*, New York: Oxford University Press, New York.
- Li, Tania M. (ed.) 1999. *Transforming the Indonesian Uplands: Marginality, Power, and Production*. Singapore: Harwood Academic Publishers.
- Li, Tania M. 2000. Articulating indigenous identity in Indonesia: Resource politics and the tribal slot. *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 149-79.
- Li, Tania M. 2005. Beyond the state and failed schemes. *American Anthropologist* 107 (3): 383-94.
- Little, Peter D. 1985. Social differentiation and pastoralist sedentarization in northern Kenya. *Africa* 55(3): 243-61.
- Little, P. D., K. Smith, B. A. Cellarius, D. L. Coppock, and C. B. Barrett. 2001. Avoiding disaster: Diversification and risk management among east African herders. *Development and Change* 32(3): 401-33.
- Lukes, Steven. 1986. *Power: Readings in Political and Social Theory*. New York: New York University Press.
- Lukes, Steven. 2005. *Power: A Radical View (2nd ed.)* London: Palgrave MacMillan.

Moore, Donald S., Jake Kosek, and Anand Pandian (eds). 2003. *Race, Nature, and the Politics of Difference*. Durham: Duke University Press.

Niamir-Fuller, M. (ed.) 1999. *Managing mobility in African rangelands: The legitimization of transhumance*. London: Intermediate Technology Publications.

Painter, M. and W. Durham. 1995. *The Social Causes of Environmental Destruction in Latin America*. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press.

Patton, Paul. 1989. Taylor and Foucault on Power and Freedom. *Political Studies* 37: 260-76.

Peters, Pauline. 1994. *Dividing the Commons: Politics, Policy and Culture in Botswana*. Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press.

Pigg, Stacy L. 1992. Inventing social categories through place: Social representations and development in Nepal. *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 34(3): 491-518.

Posey, D. A. 1993. Indigenous knowledge in the conservation and use of world forests. In K. Ramakrishna and G. M. Woodwell (eds). *World Forests for the Future: Their Uses and Conservation*. New Haven: Yale University Press.

Redford, K. H. 1991. The ecologically noble savage. *Cultural Survival Quarterly* 15: 46-48.

Redford, Kent, and Christine Padoch (eds.) 1992. *Conservation of Neotropical Forests*. New York: Columbia University Press.

Richards, Paul. 1985. *Indigenous Agricultural Revolution*. Boulder, CO: Westview Press.

Sahlins, Marshall. 2000. The discovery of the true savage. In *Culture in Practice: Selected Essays*. Pp. 353-413. New York: Zone Books.

Scott, James C. 1998. *Seeing Like a State: How Certain Schemes to Improve the Human Condition have Failed*. New Haven: Yale University Press.

Sillitoe, Paul. 1998. The development of indigenous knowledge: A new applied anthropology. *Current Anthropology* 39(2): 223-40.

Taylor, Charles. 1984. Foucault on freedom and truth, *Political Theory* 12: 152-83

Terborgh, J. 1999. *Requiem for Nature*. Washington DC: Island Press.

Warren, D. Michael., L. Jan Slikkerveer, and David Brokensha (eds) 1995. *The Cultural Dimension of Development: Indigenous Knowledge Systems*. London: Intermediate Technology Publications.

Wickramasinghe, A. 1997. Anthropogenic factors and forest management in Sri Lanka. *Applied Geography* 17(2): 87-110.