

Locating Indigenous Knowledge at the Interfaces of Modernity:
Observations based on fieldwork in Nepal

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Abstract
Locating Indigenous Knowledge at the Interfaces of Modernity:
Observations based on fieldwork in Nepal

Géralyne Bernadette Dionne

Through two decades of use, the term *indigenous knowledge* has been explored and debated as a legitimate category and analytic device in anthropology. The term has evolved from a mainly empirical reference to signifying an ideological position that highlights the role of knowledge in power relations. Generating epistemological challenges and reaching beyond structural and cognitive domains that have to this point mediated our analyses of non-Western lifeworlds, *indigenous knowledge* stresses the power of agency and place, where realities are defined in practice through daily *habitus*, rather than pre-established social structures. If knowledge is not an ‘essence’ and can be revealed only in its usage and exchange, then the question that preoccupies those working with *indigenous knowledge* remains: Ethnographically, where can one find manifestations of indigenous knowledge? Long’s notion of ‘knowledge interfaces’ provides a possible framework in which to glean the multiple interactions of local and not-so-local knowledge occurring in interfaces (contexts in which different actors and institutions negotiate knowledge repertoires) in order to gain insight into struggles for identity, space and power. Placing the actors at the centre of analysis and focusing on the relational nature, the field comes to be a field of relationships.

Fieldwork undertaken in Nepal in the spring of 2004 explored three contexts in which actors and institutions concerned with protecting *indigenous knowledge* and lifeways interact. Can focusing on ‘interfaces’ reveal how cultural and knowledge repertoires are being contested, mobilized, and reshaped within these various arena?

Dedicated to the memory of my Mother

and

To the people of Nepal

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Introduction

This thesis has two aims: First, it seeks to explore the notion of *indigenous knowledge* as a meaningful and relevant category and an analytical device within anthropology. Secondly, it considers interfaces as a potential theoretical framework in which to reveal how cultural and knowledge repertoires are being contested, mobilized, and reshaped within various arenas.

It begins with an overview of the origins of the concept of *indigenous knowledge* from its intellectual roots in cognitive and ethnoscientific studies, to its role in the field of ecological anthropology and human ecology, and finally, as a central element in applied development anthropology. This discussion of the epistemological challenges encountered through its two decades of use is intended to present lines of analytic, methodological, and ideological tensions that the concept has served to address. Briefly, *indigenous knowledge* has challenged the boundaries of our essentially Cartesian epistemological framework of analysis limited by the dualisms of the subject-object, nature-culture divides, as well as a prioritizing of the cognitive dimension of knowledge over other possible dimensions. Reaching beyond structural and cognitive domains that have to this point mediated our analyses of non-Western lifeworlds, the concept of *indigenous knowledge* has brought about a more phenomenological approach, one in which knowledge is seen ultimately as situated practice: the concrete and immediate responses to the environment through daily *habitus*. Responding to the post-modern challenge, an *indigenous knowledge* perspective stresses the power of agency and place, not as an empty space in which states and substances exist, but place as a central

component of being, where a dynamic embodied relationship is established between humans and their environments.

In reviewing the literature on framing socio-cultural analyses of *indigenous knowledge*, it is striking the extent to which this concept has evolved to encompass ever broader domains of analysis:¹ from a mainly empirical reference, to signifying a social science perspective, as well as a philosophical and ideological position that highlights the role of knowledge in power relations (Escobar 1984; Gran 1986; Marglin 1990; Parajuli 1991; Gardner & Lewis 1996; Purcell 1998; Agrawal 2002). *Indigenous knowledge* research has explored the structural similarities between non-western and western knowledge systems, basically questioning the place of scientific knowledge among a multitude of knowledges. It has critiqued the modernist notion of development, including the question of what is valid knowledge, while foregrounding the embeddedness of power and domination in knowledge processes. Within the rhetorical dimension of *indigenous knowledge*, the term has taken on a political overtone as aboriginal groups assert their identity and autonomy within dominating nation-states. Social movements now represent a genuine source of social knowledge and a particular framing of that knowledge. Non-government organizations translate the global indigenous knowledge agenda locally by helping to empower the subaltern to affirm and often revive their own knowledge(s). In all these ways, the term *indigenous knowledge* offers a framework of ideas, guidelines, and perspectives that can provide entry points into alternative ways of thinking about local resource management and the global agenda of resource conservation, both in developing and industrialized nations.

¹ For detailed surveys see Berkes 1999, Purcell 1998, and Sillitoe 1998.

An *indigenous knowledge* perspective brings with it much theoretical potential, particularly in the development context where it continues to be a prominent approach to finding appropriate local solutions. In this context, incorporating an *indigenous knowledge* perspective means serious engagement with peoples' knowledge at the local level, gaining an understanding of the interconnectedness of the technical and the symbolic, as well as having sufficient social and cultural context. Clearly it has a role to play; yet its utilization in the context of development and in representing marginalized groups remains ambiguous. The question that preoccupies those working with *indigenous knowledge* remains: Ethnographically, where can one find manifestations of indigenous knowledge? 'Knowledge' itself cannot be an 'essence', but must be revealed only in its usage. Therefore, how is knowledge to be recovered ethnographically becomes a central question (Clammer 2002). Debates about representation and feminist critiques insist that we cannot locate such knowledge in the heads of elders or informants of only one gender, or of only one social class. Knowledge can only be revealed in its usage and in the exchange of knowledge. What points exist in which knowledge is imbedded and can produce ethnographic data? One possible approach to locating *indigenous knowledge* is found within the notion of "interfaces" put forth by Norman Long (Long 1989; Arce & Long 2000; Arce & Fisher 2003).

Long's theory of interfaces provides an analytical tool that focuses on the access, sharing, and transmission of knowledge. It provides a framework in which to glean the multiple interactions of local and not-so-local knowledge at the interfaces - between actors and institutions - as they collide. Focussing on interfaces of local and "modern"

points out asymmetries of power within cultures and contributes to the analysis of knowledge/power relations within a local perspective. An interface approach with its focus on the centrality of agency entails a switch from substantives themselves (gender, power, status) to the relational nature of the appropriation of these elements. This radical change in theory and practice holds potential for ensuring a more egalitarian and sustainable development.

The aim of my fieldwork undertaken in Nepal during the Spring of 2004 was to see how local forms of *indigenous knowledge* are being reworked in interaction with changing external conditions. I wanted to get a glimpse of how globalizing and localizing processes are creating struggles for identity, space, and power among local actors and those institutions concerned with protecting *indigenous knowledge* and lifeways. In the context of the complex and heterogeneous culture of the Tamang people of Nepal, will focussing on interactions taking place at various diverse but related ‘interfaces’ help to reveal what constitutes their *indigenous knowledge*? Can instantiations of *indigenous knowledge* be gleaned through the knowledge interfaces – the contexts in which the different actors and institutions negotiate various knowledge repertoires?

Working within a post-structuralist framework of analysis whose parameters are traced through the discussion of *indigenous knowledge*, I attempt to get a sense of the extent to which “realities are defined in practice, rather than by pre-established social structures or the fixed coordinates of a semantic space” (Hastrup & Olwig 1997: 4). My

fieldwork brought me into three different contexts that could reasonably constitute knowledge interfaces and in which aspects of Nepali culture were revealed: In my first week in Kathmandu, I attended a workshop held by Canada's International Development Research Centre on a participatory Social Analysis System. I learned about a local NGO working on issues around food security and biodiversity conservation in the Rasuwa region of Nepal. I visited a Tamang village and a cultural tourism program in the high hills region of Nepal and an English boarding school in the middle hills. My limited length of time did not permit me to provide a sufficiently focussed analysis within each of these interfaces to reveal how cultural and knowledge repertoires are being contested, mobilized, and reshaped within these arena. However, approaching my fieldwork experience from an interface perspective has given me a greater sense of how analyzing the relationship between global and local can help us to better understand claims of *indigenous knowledge* in issues around the management of agro-ecological resources and sustainable development.

Chapter I – Conceptual Framework

Defining Indigenous Knowledge

The concept of *indigenous knowledge* (IK) has now saturated the literature within the domains of applied development anthropology and rural sociology becoming a major concept within development discourse. Whether it is called Indigenous Technical Knowledge, Rural People's Knowledge, Traditional Ecological Knowledge, Local Knowledge, or Traditional Knowledge, these various terms

enable, expand, or limit the domain of theoretical possibilities that one can impute to the concept. It [IK] implies certain assumptions and suggests specific research approaches. It emphasizes or de-emphasizes the peculiar conditions under which these knowledge(s) are generated (Kothari 2002: 226).

Each of these terms originated from a particular discourse and from the social or professional context in which it is used; they have slightly different connotations (though with a surprising degree of semantic overlap); and they carry particular ideological and moral significance (Ellen 2002: 236). Two terms - *indigenous* and *local* – have gained relatively more currency today. *Local knowledge* is best used to avoid the confusion and pejorative connotations associated with “traditional” or “rural” (Kothari 2002: 226). Concepts like ‘indigenous’, ‘native’ and ‘aboriginal’ are structural definitions through which people are defined in relation to a state (Kalland 2000: 321). Of all the terms, *indigenous knowledge* has internationally the most widespread use (Antweiller 1998: 471) designating the merits of local knowledge, both as empirical observation of natural phenomena, and as “paradigmatic knowledge” (Kalland 2000: 320) within a philosophical, theoretical framework. I have chosen to use primarily the term *indigenous knowledge* throughout this essay because it implies the notion of a

distinct people who have agency, as well as close ties to specific locally-constituted origins or territory. More importantly, *indigenous knowledge* implies a praxis of resistance and empowerment, aspects important to both social movements and to the field of development where *indigenous knowledge* is being promoted and contested. These issues will be addressed and elaborated through this chapter. Occasionally I revert to 'local' when the context calls for a more neutral term.

Indigenous often used interchangeably with 'native' and 'aboriginal' pertains to the first known inhabitants, as well as the beliefs and practices of an area (Kalland 2000: 321). Where the term *indigenous peoples* is limited by the criterion of "ancestral territory," the definition of *indigenous knowledge* is not. The association of the term *indigenous knowledge* with a culturally homogenous isolated group with a shared language, religion, habitat, and other cultural institutions is difficult to correlate to an exact autochthonous group. In fact, the term *indigenous knowledge* can be used to denote the knowledge of a group of people who are not indigenous by ancestral territory, such as groups of Africans in the diaspora who have retained a coherent body of ancestral knowledge. Nevertheless, a shared culture and shared history is central to the designation *indigenous*. The term refers to a primordial identity, to people with primary attachments to land and culture who have survived in their lands through the upheaval of colonialism and corporate exploitation (Niezen 2003: 5). As further elaborated by Niezen, the formation and expression of indigenous identity indicates collective attributes. It sets social groups and their networks apart from others in a "we-they" dichotomy, distinguishing their identity and experience from those of dominant cultures

in nation-states. Indigenous peoples also share the experience of marginalized groups facing the negative impacts of resource extraction and economic modernization. The basis of connection among many indigenous groups consists of

an attachment that all participants share to some form of subsistence economy, to a territory or homeland that predates the arrival of settlers and surveyors, to a spiritual system that predates the arrival of missionaries, to a language that expresses everything that is important and distinct about their place in the universe. More importantly, they share the destruction and loss of these things. (Niezen 2003: 23)

Deciding who is indigenous often depends on political systems and their policies and generally occurs where there are other populations that are considered settlers. There is a tendency to apply the word *indigenous* to all that pertains to local, national or regional populations in less developed countries, so that the application of the term *indigenous knowledge* has been extended to territorially non-indigenous communities who insist on their own history and culture. For example, in his discussion of place-based knowledge, Lipschutzs argues that “indigeneity is a flexible construct and can include multi-generational Montana ranchers and New England farmers as well as Native Americans” (1999: 161) where authenticity is based on duration of habitation. *Indigenous knowledge* embraces knowledge(s) of non-indigenous rural peoples, farmers, peasants, nomadic tribes, and so on. It is used rhetorically by indigenous peoples themselves in order to gather support in their struggle to gain recognition of distinct peoples with rights to self-determination. The common understanding is that indigenous groups should determine – informed by their understandings based on their interactions within their locality – their own historical destiny. Yet from an epistemological perspective, no knowledge can be considered strictly indigenous as there has always

been influences directly or indirectly into a particular region from outside. The focus on *indigenous knowledge* is generally on the “here” and “now”; that is, knowledge(s) and practices that enable indigenous and rural peoples to continually adapt to change (Kothari 2002: 228).

a. The Empirical Dimension of Indigenous Knowledge

The methodological approach of early studies of agricultural and environmental practices tended to be cognitive and ethnoscientific. In the 1960s, anthropologists were engaged in research looking for and comparing indigenous understandings through classifications of resource use practices. Harold Conklin’s (1957) study of shifting cultivation among the Hanunoo and Metzger and William’s (1966) analysis of Tzeltal firewood categories aimed to understand how poor farmers selected fuel when faced with resource depletion (Ellen 2000: 237).

This desire to get at an understanding of *indigenous knowledge* and “knowledge systems” has its intellectual roots within the fields of ethnoscience, ecological anthropology, and human ecology. Scholars working in these fields were interested in exploring the way in which relations between humans and their environment are mediated by culture (Ingold 1992: 39). There was a sense that traditional practices may contain prescriptive ‘models’ for sustainable resource use and stewardship. There was a search to discover principles of sustainability that conserve diversity within indigenous peoples’ effective “science” and resource use practices (Sillitoe 1998: 223). They wanted to discover “balanced ecosystems” and the “wisdom of indigenous cosmologies”

(Croll & Parkin 1992) that might be “more conducive to sustainable resource use than modern representations” (Hornborg 1996; 54). This interest was also motivated by a challenge to the positivist-reductionist paradigm and “public dissatisfaction with the outcome of modernist analysis in fields such as resource conservation” (Berkes 1999:17).

Cultural anthropologists were the earliest scholars to explore and value indigenous people’s knowledge. Their investigations drew attention to the adaptive capacities of indigenous societies, both in the efficacy of their “cognized models” of the local environment, and in their structural similarities to biological populations and living systems. Peasant societies were considered as having adaptive systems just like any other biological population, and culture was posited as an ecologically functional attribute of the environment. Ecological anthropologists working in rural and agrarian Third World societies unearthed important data on local ethnoscientific knowledge(s) and the relationships between cultural practices and resources management. Rappaport’s *Pigs for the Ancestors* (1968) is an example of this ethnographically rich “systems thinking” about human adaptation to the environment. According to Hornborg, “no work has had a greater impact on the development of an ecosystem approach in anthropology” (2000:46). Rappaport suggests that traditional systems and social structures function as a homeostat or regulator with respect to environmental stability in a region. Critiques of Rappaport’s ecological anthropology, on the other hand, have pointed out that it is couched in functionalist terms and constrained by the categories of dualism (Hornborg 1996).

Indigenous knowledge and its associated terms (local, rural, traditional ecological knowledge) came to be used within the context of development studies beginning with the work of Robert Chamber's group at the Institute for Development Studies in 1979. This formative phase of IK-inspired research and application produced seminal works describing 'indigenous technical knowledge' seeing it as a possible solution to the failures of externally-imposed transfer-of-technology and top-down development (Pottier 2003). They were also seeking an appreciation of local understanding and practices compared to those of outside researchers and development workers. *Indigenous knowledge* came to be seen as a necessary resource for development (Antweiller 1998) and culturally appropriate and environmentally sustainable practices were recognized as essential components in local development projects (Sillitoe 1998:224). The works such as Brokensha *et al* (1980) and Warren *et al* (1995) focused on the technological rationality of adapted peasant production practices. This interest in *indigenous knowledge* brought both anthropologists and developers to look for and extract elements of local knowledge according to one's sub-disciplines. It was both viewed and used within a positivist, scientific framework and reflected different research interests, theoretical stances, and applications as well as the influence of disciplines seeking to represent the knowledge of a culture under study (ecology, geography, anthropology, sociology, forestry, agriculture). The assumption was that the value of local knowledge and what it had to offer could be validated by science and made use of in the context of sustainable local development. This approach to studying culture encouraged taking local knowledge seriously. At the same time, its use resulted in debates because it required analysis of imposed categories. This perspective urged

development practitioners to be receptive to the technology, skills and accumulated knowledge of people working at the local level. However this utilitarian view could not capture the social and cultural variations implicit in a community's knowledge and the element of power that has come to be seen as central to an understanding of knowledge.

The term *indigenous knowledge* has come to encompass important ontological and epistemology developments originating initially within ecological anthropology - mainly through the works of Ingold (1992), Descola (1996), Hornborg (1996), Hviding (1996) and Ellen (2000). Taking their analyses of man-environment relations beyond early functionalist/structuralist interpretations, they question the dualism of culture and nature implicit in a cognitivist view, the subject-object divide, and emphasize the importance of local specificity imbedded in socio-cultural contexts. The cognitivist account of perception, whose roots lie deep in the western dualistic worldview, erects an impermeable barrier between the 'interior world' of human subjects and their exterior conditions of existence. Getting beyond that barrier, Ingold proposes that knowledge of the lifeworld is constituted of and based primarily on a synergistic relationship between person and environment. This framework of analysis, what Ingold refers to as "alternative ecological anthropology," is based on the mutual constitution of person and environment through "continuous intercourse with their environments" (Ingold 1992: 40).

Knowledge of the lifeworld is seen as constituted of and based on the relationship between person and environment, and concentrated on the importance of local specificity imbedded in socio-cultural contexts (Hornborg 1996: 51). Acquiring knowledge of the natural world comes is seen as a negotiated relationship between the individual and the environment – one in which the natural world is reconstructed in the process. In this new methodological approach, the emphasis is placed on relationships, context or place, and interaction at both local and global levels – between people and land, between people and people, and people and the state. Analysis is on the institutions and customs transformed through processes and shaped by complex interacting sociocultural organizing principles that operate in the social dimension on multiple levels. These are not tied to particular domains (which often correspond to the segmentation of our own worldview) and cosmological and ecological contexts and wider political processes come into play.

Ingold's phenomenological approach highlights the way in which human beings co-opt what they find in their immediate environment to make an already existing object fit into a conceptual image of an intended future use held in the mind of the user. As such, we modify what we find in our environment to suit our current needs and purposes. It is in this "movement of human beings' practical engagement with the components of their surroundings, that form is generated" (Ingold 1992: 62). Ultimately, what people do with their environment, whether in the imagination or in reality, arises within the course of their involved activity, in the specific relational contexts of their practical engagements with their surroundings (Ingold 1993: 76). In this way, form does

not preclude our relationship with the environment, but is generated through practical engagement with the components of one's surroundings. In his discussion of the significance of Uexkull's concept of *Umwelt* (denoting the subjective world of an organism) for ecological anthropology, Ingold concludes that "humans not only construct their environments, but are also the authors of their own projects of construction" (Ingold 1992: 43). Thus, we dwell in a world that is not separate from us, and knowledge of it is seen as a process of enskillment acquired through practical engagement with the environment.

The implications of this new framework of analysis evolving within ecological anthropology to *indigenous knowledge* are significant: The emphasis on engagement with the natural world, relatedness, embeddedness, contextuality, and agency are all adopted as aspects associated with an *indigenous knowledge* perspective. These concepts are particularly suited to developing an in-depth understanding of the complexity of a territorially-designated culture. From an ethnographic perspective, working from within an anti-essentialist, non-dualist, and agency perspective, means paying closer attention to the emic, analysis of cultural phenomena. The contextualist approach is based on observing the day to day activities of the various facets of peoples' lifeways, attempting to identify the texts and icons, idioms of exchange that the community encounters as they move through their daily lives. These are referred to as "schemata of praxis" for Descola (1996) and "cognitive axes that organize human-environment relations" for Ellen (2000). In addition, the power of place in the local cannot be underestimated in this new "alternative ecological anthropology" (Ingold 1992: 41). It satisfies the need for

an embodied aspect of local knowledge which clearly distinguishes it from western, global, abstract knowledge.

Alf Hornborg (1996) sees ecological relations as based on meaning; they are semiotic. He speaks of ‘contextualism’ as a means to get beyond the epistemological dualism existing within human ecology. In his view, contextualism is “the logical antithesis to *modernity*” as defined by Giddens (1990). Giddens emphasizes the disembedding (decontextualising) tendencies in modernity that pervade all aspects of modern society. The disenchantment with western rationality and the recognition of the limitations of totalising institutions and knowledge systems (Hornborg 1996: 54) are part and parcel of Cartesian dualism. According to Hornborg -

A ‘contextualist’ stance is one that denies the capacity of an abstract, totalising system such as science or the market to solve the basic problems of human survival, recognising local and implicit meanings as the essential components of a sustainable livelihood. (Hornborg 1996: 45).

A second element in Hornborg’s recontextualisation of the production of knowledge relating to local ecological practice is the significance of metaphor. Central to the contextualist argument is the question of “What is it in the nature of traditional understandings that might make them more meaningful and at the same time more conducive to sustainable resource use than modern representations?” (Hornborg 1996: 54).

Metaphors do not convey information *per se*, but codify normative, practical attitudes, and metaphorical understandings of nature. These embody the responsibilities which must adhere to the act of ‘knowing’ – where knowing is a relationship with nature

that is constitutive both of the knower and the known. Specifically, “If knowledge is a relationship with nature that is constitutive both of the knower and the known, then metaphor is a mode of knowing that incorporates the very conditions of knowledge.”

Metaphor is a mode of knowing that positions the human subject by evoking non-objectifiable inner states associated with specific forms of practice. The significance of metaphor for contextualism thus lies in its capacity to activate tacit, practical knowledge based on experience of highly specific, local conditions (Hornborg 1006: 55).

Within this framework, *indigenous knowledge* does not register complex ecological relations, or convey information *per se*. *Indigenous knowledge* codifies normative, practical attitudes, metaphorical understandings of nature, embodying the responsibilities implicit in the act of ‘knowing’. As such, it has the capacity to activate tacit, practical knowledge based on experience of highly specific, local conditions, and provides ‘cues’ for the activation of specific, practical repertoires appropriated in the context of action. As such, constructions of the environment codify and reinforce a specific, ecological *habitus*. The resulting ‘contextualist’ paradigm holds significance. Rather than look at indigenous knowledge as another ‘resource’ to be tapped into and apply, it may be more fruitful to focus on the socio-cultural contexts which allow knowledge of the environment to evolve and persist over time.

Writing in a similar vein, Klaus Seeland extends the realm of *indigenous knowledge* further into a phenomenological dimension. “The ‘local knowledge’ of forests is a holistic view of what is revealed to human perception through, and as, forest life” (Seeland 1997: 101). In this view, *indigenous knowledge* signifies something that

originates locally and is performed by a defined community or society associated with that locale:

Indigenous knowledge emerges as peoples' perceptions and experiences in an environment, a continuous process of observation and interpretation in relation to the local knowledge, everyday rationalities and transcendental powers....
Indigenous knowledge is human life-experience in a distinct natural and cultural amalgamation, within a unique local and contemporary setting (Seeland 1997:103).

In this way, *indigenous knowledge* is closely bound to a particular context. And that context becomes the focus of all the knowledge at a person's disposal at the moment s/he is in a situation in which knowledge is called upon within this context. In Seeland's phenomenological perspective, culture is composed of numerous contexts that are interconnected. These contexts refer to each other through their inter-connectedness and represent different and multifold forms of being, human decision-making and action, all within an ontological framework.

Paul Richards, responding to what he describes as "the prevalence of a misplaced abstraction in anthropological accounts of local knowledge," contends that such theorizing "overburdens our already limited understanding of human improvisational capacities... making intellectual mysteries out of situations and activities whose practical import is obvious to all but the observer" (Richards 1993: 62). Further, if "the anthropology of knowledge is to progress beyond the by now well-rehearsed limits set by the rationality debate on the one hand and an anti-scientific, post-modern, culture theory on the other," we require a more precise ethnography of these kinds of performance skills (Richards 1993: 63). Drawing on Anthony Giddens' analysis of the links between performance (agency), structure (varying features of institutions), and

power evident in control of resources and the capacity to act, Richards places the focus on the social agent and how agents achieve results. This view tends to see social change as a performance enacted on a stage with carefully delimited socio-economic characteristics. Knowledge is seen as the range of skills and practices which a group collectively or individually may manipulate within their particular locations and in response to their particular environmental conditions, making evident the local and precise knowledge generated within a particular cultural context. Knowledge becomes a context-specific improvisational capacity.

Challenging the assumption that cultivation practices are evidence of a fixed stock of knowledge from which techniques are drawn, Richards' theory of performance proposes that the range of skills and strategies employed by farmers extend beyond simple applied knowledge into a "set of improvisational capacities called forth by the needs of the moment" (Richards 1993: 62). His discussion points out that these human improvisational capacities are often ways of conceptualizing and rehearsing ideal outcomes; even though to an outsider they may appear as a botched theory of natural causes. Within the context of agriculture, an anthropology of local knowledge would treat agriculture as a component within a broader field of social action - as a performance of lay actors. Ethnographic methods in agricultural research would, for example, examine how farming households are structured, and how roles are negotiated. It would attempt to get at the grounding of a community's creativity, to identify the sense of "vision and purpose through which social groups retain their capacity to act in a creative and cohesive manner" (Richards 1993: 71).

Practices are acknowledged as important processes imbedded in the social context that contains its own cultural logic and imperatives. The ethnographic implication is that phenomena can be interpreted through a hermeneutic analysis. This entails identifying the metaphoric transfer, either of the spiritual world to the material, or a recognition of the similarities between already known and new phenomena which are, in this way, appropriated as culture. This approach to local knowledge stresses the importance of treating knowing as a “practical, situated activity, constituted by a past but changing history of practices (Hobart 1993: 17). Kothari echoes his view, seeing knowledge as “the dexterity or skills acquired from practice, experience, and a history of past and present performance under familiar if not similar conditions” (Kothari 2002: 230). These views echo Bourdieu who argues for an analysis of action based on accepted social practice, or *habitus* (1990).

James Scott’s discussion of *metis* in *Seeing Like a State* (1998) emphasizes the qualities of *metis*, the kind of knowledge that can only be acquired by local practice and experience through skillful craft. Such highly contextual skills emphasize localness and particularity. The holder of practical knowledge lives year round in the field of observation. Having no outside experts to rely on beyond his experienced neighbours, his practical knowledge is based on close and astute observation of the environment, and as a member of a community as the body of knowledge could not be amassed on one’s own. Unlike scientific or other codified systems of knowledge, *metis* is very difficult to explain or record. An experienced practitioner of a skill or craft develops

a large repertoire of moves, visual judgments, a sense of touch, or a discriminating gestalt for assessing the work as well as a range of accurate intuitions born of experience that defy being communicated apart from practice.” (Scott 1998: 329).

Using language as a parallel, general rules are like grammar, where *metis* is like the actual speech used to communicate in a specific context.

Scott illustrates the way in which *metis* is denigrated in comparison with scientific knowledge, due to its practical, opportune, and contextual nature. Pure reason came to be an essential quality of rationality in the establishment of science. As such, these local qualities keep *metis* from being integrated into the general conventions of scientific discourse. As a result, there is a significant gap between generally abstract knowledge and this situated knowledge. The holder of local knowledge has an invested interest in, and the ability to, influence the outcome of that particular context. On the other hand, the application of universal general rules as solutions to local problems, what he refers to as “state simplifications,” ignores the particularities imbedded in place and consequently results in failure. This will be discussed more fully in a later section.

Hobart’s view of knowledge as situated practices places emphasis on agency. “Accounts of knowledge are agentive. They define the objects, or subjects, of that knowledge, empower some people’s being able to know, but others as not and determine what counts as knowledge itself” (Hobart 1995: 50). Rather than see knowledge as a timeless essence, or some kind of mental entity, knowledge is constituted in historically

and culturally specific situations in which it invokes and encloses reflection on the purposes, agents, subjects, and objects attributed to the situation. Any separation of knowledge from its human agents and from the situations in which it is produced, reproduced, transformed and made effective, present little more than decontextualized inventories of people's knowledge. This would ignore the social and cultural context in which the knowledge is generated, and deny people's agency. Quoting Leeuwis et al (1990: 20-21), Kothari emphasizes the important link between knowledge and agency in relation to power: "(K)nowledge processes are embedded in social processes that involve aspects of power, authority, and legitimization; and they are as likely to reflect and contribute to conflict." Like science, *indigenous knowledge* is also constituted by multiple strains of knowledges engaged in power struggles to allow, disallow, and resist certain understandings and to create spaces for the generation of only certain types of knowledges. These involve aspects of control, authority and power that are embedded in social relationships.

The above discussion covers treatment of the mainly empirical, descriptive use of the term *indigenous knowledge*, embodying observations of natural phenomena, imbedded in a place and known by a community over a continuous period of time through lived experience. Ellen defines *indigenous knowledge* as -

local, orally transmitted, a consequence of practical engagement, reinforced by experience, empirical rather than theoretical, repetitive, fluid and negotiable, shared but asymmetrically distributed, largely functional, and embedded in a more encompassing cultural matrix (Ellen commenting in Sillitoe 1998: 238).

This review has highlighted the ways in which the study of *indigenous knowledge* has advanced our understanding of the nature of knowledge – mostly by challenging our concepts and models (Sillitoe 1998: 227). Alongside this increasing reflexivity within an emerging post-structuralist context, there arose deconstructions of the increasingly ‘reified’ category of indigenous knowledge itself. Questions arose regarding *indigenous knowledge* as a subject or methodology and as a “discourse riddled with contradictions” (Hobart 1993). There came a need to discuss claims for the existence of *indigenous knowledge* as “a meaningful and relevant category” (Ellen 2000: 246), to examine what is knowledge anyway and finally, to address the blurry distinction between knowledge and culture.

The various theoretical approaches to understanding what constitutes *indigenous knowledge* outlined above are not exclusive ways of knowing, or meant to encompass distinct forms of knowledge or knowing: A practice can be known both as a metaphor and as a performance and reflect a cosmology for example. The focus of those scholars is mainly on the more material practices of a cultural context, such as agriculture, and hence more concerned with empirically-constituted knowledge – which is known in various manners and differently depending on one’s position in the community. In addressing the question of whether *indigenous knowledge* is indeed a legitimate category and analytic device within anthropological analyses, Ellen compares the status of *indigenous knowledge* according to general qualitative distinctions based on their social or cognitive standing. Qualitative distinctions include categories such as cognitive, non-cognitive, and linguistic. The default understanding of knowledge in Ellen’s analysis

encompasses “usually conscious, cognized, or reflective knowledge: something we are aware of acquiring and using, and often do so purposely in order to solve various technical and social problems” (2000: 244). However, people also acquire knowledge unreflectively through the process of socialization; hence, *tacit knowledge*. In addition, what is known as *embodied knowledge* is acquired through experience and informal apprenticeship, similar to Richard’s notion of performance. Cognitive knowledge is generally encoded in language, such as in animal/plant classification. Yet another distinction is that between *technical* (know-how) and *symbolic* or *ontological knowledge*. Some argue that empirical knowledge is really structured around the ‘cosmovision’ or ontology of a community. Yet, local people “simultaneously embed their practical knowledge in the symbolic, and their symbolic knowledge in the practical, but are nevertheless often quite able to separate the two when it matters” (Ellen 2000: 241). Drawing distinctions between different types of knowledge for purposes of getting at the cognitive contours with *indigenous knowledge* is a daunting exercise. These categories appear to be based more on the social or cognitive standing of such knowledges. One wonders whether the philosophical dualisms reflect a continuing reliance on mind-body theories, and the divisions based on the professional context in which they’re used, with varying degrees of semantic overlap.

In the literature review above, *indigenous knowledge* is presented as separate from the cultures in which it originates, generally with reference to certain ritual and symbolic factors. But, how does one consider whether and how indigenous knowledge might differ from culture is a question left unanswered. In this way, *indigenous*

knowledge seems to be placed outside culture, or conflated with culture. The general view is that culture comprises a larger aspect than knowledge and includes all those practices (active and latent) and the material outcomes which arise through and are located in linguistic and non-linguistic instantiations and transmitted between individuals in all these ways. According to Ellen,

Knowledge must always be an aspect of culture and though perhaps contributing to its organization, it is also more than mere *information*. Knowledge is generated at the interface of cultural memory and individual intelligence, and in addition, therefore, always carries a moral and social load. (Ellen 2000: 239)

Where culture is treated as ubiquitous, knowledge within a culture is dispersed, dependant on one's standing, class, gender, and education. It is always partial, not uniformly distributed, and shared among specific sections of a population, and with common knowledge shared by the majority. Knowledge is held in its partiality by individuals and the value of the knowledge within culture depends on an individual's standing given the distribution of power determined through place-making (to be discussed in more detail in the next section). Knowledge is dormant and tacit, revealed only in its use – whether through activities or through discursive means - and in this way is one possible expression of culture. Interestingly, it is when we attempt to make conversions between different culturally or ecologically remote contexts, that the distinctions between multiple knowledges within a community become evident and important. The conflation, according to Ellen, arises because so much analysis of culture is concerned with mentalist conceptions in which it is generally understood as a web of symbols or meanings. Yet, this characterisation can be equally applied to knowledge (Ellen 2000: 239).

Through these progressive understandings brought about by reconceptualizing the relationship between man and his environment, “local knowledge began to reveal itself as the multifarious, contestable product of an ever-evolving syncretistic process” (Sillitoe 2002a). The unitary concept of ‘local knowledge’ fragmented into a plurality of local knowledges, putting science in a different light and asking social scientists to rethink the dichotomy between local and other forms of knowledge. However, this discussion of the empirical dimension of *indigenous knowledge* is too narrow a perspective if we are to understand “the rhetorical power this concept has attained today” (Kalland 2000: 319). It is also necessary to consider its second dimension: the discourse originating from indigenous peoples themselves that is implicit in the term.

b. The Rhetorical Dimension of Indigenous Knowledge: As a Critique of Modernity

According to Stephen Brush (1993), the term *indigenous knowledge* embodies the “suggestion that minority ethnic groups should have more power and recognition” (Brush 1993: 653). Purcell considers the study and application of *indigenous knowledge* as “indigenous praxis as a transformative process,” meaning that “indigenous/folk/local groups should determine, informed by their cultural knowledge, their own historical destiny” (Purcell 1998: 260). This dimension associated with use of the term *indigenous knowledge* emphasizes the notion of cultural empowerment – often in relation to a critique of modernity and notions of development – rather than the skills or practices performed locally. Use of the term in this context forms the basis of redefining and reasserting the representation of marginalized peoples (Marsden 1994; Purcell 1998; Kalland 2000; Kamata 2000; Ruddle 2000; Kothari 2002) and often entails the promotion of localized grassroots movements (Escobar 1994). In what may be seen as a social movement, indigenous peoples here are asserting their voices, reclaiming their histories as a first step toward securing their future and that of the generations to follow. They are looking for alternatives to the Western model of development. They insist on claiming, and demand recognition of, their unique culture as the most important factor to define what an alternate path may look like. In addressing the politics of identity and representation, the term carries connotations of rights, power, and equality. This broader interest in the rhetorical or political dimension of *indigenous knowledge* has its roots in a general dissatisfaction with the process of Western development and a challenge to Western cultural hegemony (Purcell 1998: 258-260). It is equally part of an intellectual reaction against what Friedman (1992 in Kalland 2000: 287) calls the anti-culture and

anti-nature of modernism and an increasing scepticism of people in the industrialized world of the problem-solving power of the scientific paradigm.

Antweiller addresses the dimension of power in *indigenous knowledge*. The term applied to knowledge has today come to be used in a context of non-Western practices, the knowledge of marginalized minorities compared and contrasted with knowledge promoted at the level of the nation-state (1998: 470). James Scott has illustrated how a certain understanding of science, modernity, and development has privileged the dominant discourse so that all other kinds of knowledge are regarded as “backward, static traditions, as old wives tales and superstitions” (Scott : 331). Similarly, Kothari’s investigation of various related terms explores power issues implicit in theoretical approaches associated with their use. The term *subaltern knowledge* for example, embodies a central condition of local knowledge in relation to “the scientific/Western knowledge establishment – that of being marginalized but resisting or with the potential to resist this process” (Kothari 2002: 225). So that although there has been much comparison between Western scientific and local or *indigenous knowledge*, in Kothari’s analysis, “the central question is not how science and *indigenous knowledge* compare, but to ask, as feminists have shown, how knowledge-power webs exclude, include, invalidate, or systemically marginalize certain understandings” (2002: 270).

Clearly, knowledge claims need to be understood within a political context. In this respect, it is important to highlight the dynamic and partial nature of *indigenous knowledge*. Even though a community may share a common stock of knowledge, it is

subject to stratification and distributed to sections of a population according to standing, gender, age, specialization, and experience. How it is obtained and what is shared is always determined by patterns of authority (to be addressed more fully in the next section). What is generally seen as bounded and tied to particular spaces - as intrinsic to and changeless (evoked with the synonym 'traditional knowledge') - is far from hermetically sealed from other kinds of knowledge. Local populations continually absorb and integrate new knowledge (including scientific knowledge), often transforming it in their own way.

c. A Feminist Perspective: Partial Knowledge

The concept of “situated knowledges” (Haraway 1988; Feldman and Welsh 1995; Gurunani 2002) is elaborated in Gurunani’s analysis. She illustrates how rural women’s knowledge situated in their everyday work in farming differs from urban women’s and men’s perspectives. By giving voice to exclusively women’s knowledge, feminist theorists have highlighted the power relations embedded in knowledge creation. We see that knowledge is partial, generated by a multiplicity of actors, unevenly distributed, political, and enmeshed in power relations.

Feminist scholars have challenged the subject-object dichotomy that has characterized both the epistemology and the practice of social science (Haraway 1988; Feldman and Welsh 1995; Gururani 2002). Feminist critiques illustrate how much of what is represented as “objective” is actually produced through ideology and patterns of power. Through a focus on, and concern with, partial perspective and the salience of place and standpoint, a feminist perspective (particularly Haraway 1998; and Harding 1991) has contributed much to examining what is meant by local knowledge and its contribution to environment and resource management. It is fitting therefore to introduce discussion of this second dimension of *indigenous knowledge* - one in which power and authority are privileged – with a definition by a feminist social scientist:

Knowledge comprises a culturally coded set of ideas and events that are imbricated in power and authority and informed by locally specific relations, interests, and politics. For example, whose knowledge is considered worthy, or which discursive set of ideas, interpretations, and practices come to be defined as “knowledge”, and how knowledge is circulated, transformed, and transmitted, are some questions that reflect the thorny cultural politics of knowledge and power (Gururani 2002: 315).

Relations of power and authority carve spaces for “the cultural production of knowledge” and provide the context in which certain aspects of knowledge are privileged systematically over others. Gururani describes how the highly differentiated knowledge among men and women imbedded in asymmetrical relations of power made it difficult for women to articulate their knowledge. Her analysis of gender and environmental loss in the Kumuan Himalayas illustrates how forest practices have been shaped historically in response to changes in forestry policies. The establishment of colonial forestry transformed local people’s relationships with their forests, altered their customary rights, and forced out-migration to the cities. As the men left, women became the prime producers of livelihood, generating new strategies to survive in meagre settings with less support. These “changes in social, political and ecological landscapes produce knowledge that influences practice, and new practices in turn shape the contours of knowledge” (Gururani 2003: 13). Not only is new knowledge created, some knowledge is also lost as ecological landscapes and social relationships change. She illustrates precisely the way knowledge is produced and reproduced, not as a pre-constituted set of ideas that remain unchanged generation after generation. Rather, it is constituted and reconstituted in response to social and ecological transformation and in shaping social relations in the village.

The focus on the salience of place and standpoint in the construction of knowledge highlights the essential fact that all associations of place, people and culture are social and historical creations to be explained – rather than pre-given natural facts. Cultural territorializations must be viewed as the results of ongoing historical and

political processes of place-making. These processes are the focus of anthropological questioning (Gupta and Ferguson 1997: 4). Gupta and Ferguson point out that concepts of culture consistently emphasize an overriding sense of order existing within a culture seen in the classical notion of social cohesion, structuralism, or symbolic social action.

Looking at the local from a wider perspective, we see how the created opposition of local and global also has implications of power – especially when it comes to understanding the production of knowledges. There has always been a presumed premise that locality and community are obvious, with the rootedness of peoples and cultures in their territorially-defined place seen as the norm. The “local” is understood as the original, the centred, the natural, the authentic, as opposed to “the global”, which is understood as new, external, artificially imposed and inauthentic. This spatial confinement built into the notion of the “local” may be a romanticizing of ‘the native’s’ supposedly contained world of tradition, culture, simplicity, in contrast to the ethnographer’s modern world of notions of Enlightenment, development, and science.

It is now argued that the apparently immediate experience of community is in fact constituted by a wider set of social and spatial relations (Gupta and Ferguson 1997: 6). Place-making always involves a construction, rather than merely a discovery of difference. As a locus of positionality, “place” produces a particular set of structures that gives concrete meaning to social relations. These social relations are “place-based” manifestations, so that the particular mix of relations produces a particular set of structures that give concrete meaning to social relations represented in the categories of

class, gender, race. etc. (Dirlik 1998: 10). The main point here is that the making of spaces into places is always implicated in configurations of power. Likewise, the notion of community identity does not exist pre-given in rooted communities. Rather, it is a somewhat unstable relation of difference:

Community is not simply recognizing cultural similarity or social contiguity - it is a categorical identity produced through forms of exclusion and the construction of difference and otherness. Individual and collective identities are formed through processes of exclusion and othering. (Gupta and Ferguson 1996: 13)

As with locality itself, it is not simply that one is situated in a certain place, but the particular place is defined as set apart from and opposed to other places. Thus, the dynamics of the intertwining of place and power in culture involves the construction of selves onto the creation of territorial or other sorts of communities. This entails turning away from the idea that locality and community are pre-given or natural, and focusing instead on social and political processes of place-making where place-making is constituted as a wider set of embodied practices (social and spatial relations) that shape identity and enable resistance (Massey 1994; Probyn 1990; Escobar 2001). As Donna Haraway has suggested, shifting the unit of focus from social relations within human community to a 'biotic community' may reveal layers of social creativity and transformation (Haraway 1988).

Recognizing the pluralities of knowledge within a local context as constructed, as situated, and always from a partial perspective (rather than extant *a priori*) helps to bring about a larger treatment of the subject. Arguing for a partial perspective and a diversity of interpretations, meanings, and practices, recognizes a set of claims about

knowledge production and environmental management different from those offered by positive, abstract, externally-produced science. However, the construction of an opposition between the local and general scientific knowledge actually subverts rather than allows one to embrace the complexity of partial and situated knowledges (Feldman and Walsh 1995:31; Cheater 1995).

One way in which this is occurring is through the opposition of local and global which often entails a gendered association of the local - with women inhabiting a feminized private, domestic, or natural space. A feminized “local” may be considered natural, whereas an implicitly masculine is considered global, an artificial intrusion (Massey discussed in Akhil and Ferguson 1996: 6). Taking this tendency further, Gururani illustrates how in India, for example, women are increasingly identified as “the authentic subjects of pure local knowledge who by definition harbour indigenous knowledge that is not only distinct from men’s but also knowledge that is necessarily localized and uncontaminated by the forces of modernity and the market” (Gururani 1997: 315). Women are seen as the new *indigenes* who can pave the way for environmentally sustainable practices.

Given the emphasis on the power of the local, it is important to consider the place of the global, as places have come face to face with the operations of global forces more directly. This is due to the nation-state becoming more complicit in globalization’s agenda while abandoning its earlier ascribed role in mediating the global and the local (Dirlik 1998: 11). The participation of the state in the discourse and processes of the

development agenda occurs through their internalization of the knowledge and norms of the global system. Places must now fend for themselves as indigenous, ecological, social, and communitarian movements articulate their reaffirmation of spirit, nature, and place against developmentalism. Those movements, in the words of Dirlik, reassert

The priority of abolishing the alienation of humans from nature, with a corresponding re-evaluation of relationships between humans that offer a radical and meaningful criticism of modernist developmentalism. (Dirlik 1998: 12)

To sum up, so far I have identified some of the distinctive features of an analytical framework that has served to carve out a meaningful intellectual space which, for the sake of convenience, we call *indigenous knowledge*.

d. Indigenous Knowledge Confronts Modernity

The present world situation is one in which a multiplicity of complex and changing interconnections impact at the local and global levels. Discerning and interpreting the interrelated complex processes resulting from forces of globalization constitutes a critical part of the research agenda in the social sciences generally. Norman Long groups these changes where significant restructuring is taking place into three dimensions of social change (1996: 39):

- 1) The first of the three interwoven fields has to do with changes in production, work, and economic life;
- 2) The second dimension concerns the changing nature of the state, changing power domains, and the appearance of new social movements and socio-political identities. These new social and political identities and movements are based on social commitments related to gender, ethnicity, locality, religion, membership of environmentalist or human rights groups.
- 3) The third field relates to issues of knowledge, science, and technology. In Long's analysis, this area focuses on the nature and impact of the rapidly growing 'information society'. It also encompasses issues concerning knowledge generation, dissemination, utilization and transformation (Long 1996: 38).

Most relevant to this thesis is,

the encounter between so-called 'expert' and 'local' modes of knowledge; the clashes and accommodations that take place between contrasting cultural and epistemological frameworks; the affirmation of the 'power of science' to transform social life and steer change; and the transformation of knowledge and technology at the interface between intervening 'development' institutions and their so-called 'recipient' groups. (Long 1996: 39)

In addressing issues around the validation, extraction, and use of the expertise that has become part of local people's knowledge resulting from their long-term relationship with the local environment, the *indigenous knowledge movement* brings into focus issues around resource use and human rights often through issues of ethnicity, caste, and gender, depending on the specifics of the local group.

As a theoretical model of social change, modernization theory has been widely critiqued and is now recognized as seriously flawed. The overall narrative of modernization regards economic growth as a normal condition of progress. And progress means not only the transcendence of tradition, it also requires the organisation of the economy's modern sector, appropriate social institutions, and development of corresponding value frameworks. Successful modernization entails erecting appropriate economic, technological, and demographic conditions. These conditions are functionally segmented orders and considered quite separate from the multifarious experiences and practices of everyday life of local communities. In fact, the resulting segmented view of the social world does not allow for how alternate viable forms of social organisations might exist apart from those structures (Arce & Long 1998: 6).

On another plane, modernization theory views the dynamic occurring within the multiplicity of global interconnections as a centre-periphery relationship; one of domination, with local communities being mainly submissive. The emphasis here is more on the ways in which societies on the 'periphery' are integrated by the dominating centre, the cultural expressions of economic dependency and/or resistance. More

recently however, modernity is seen less as a single, coherent development and those external global and modernizing forces are beginning to reveal themselves as more complex, more fragmented, and less hegemonic. People are not wholly constrained by exploitative superstructures or the 'world system'; they are active agents. In addition, 'local' responses are being seen as more diverse, more dynamic, and not considered as fragile as in the early views (Pottier 1999: 5). Importantly, the centre is no longer viewed as "a monolithic entity sustained by grand narratives of progress, but as a set of situated and interrelated knowledges and practices, all of which are simultaneously local and global" (Moore 1996: 9; also Ingold 1993; Hannerz 1996).

This alternative view – a decentred, situated, engaged perspective – gives greater emphasis to the role of agency. In response to processes associated with global forces or development interventions impacting at the local level, people do develop strategies to solve the problems they face. These often result in the emergence of new alliances and struggles for space and power within communities. These processes "generate new modes of economic organization and livelihood, new identities, alliances and struggles for space and power, and new cultural and knowledge repertoires." (Long 1996: 46)

According to Long,

Changing global conditions – whether economic, political, cultural or environmental – are, as it were, 'relocalized' within national, regional or local frameworks of knowledge and organization which, in turn, are constantly being reworked in interaction with the wider context (Long, 1996: 43).

Individual and community strategies may involve networks, community, or an appeal to certain widely accepted value positions as seen in social movements (to be

discussed momentarily). On the basis of 'local' knowledge, organization, and values, people attempt to come to grips cognitively and organizationally to mediate and transform these new circumstances in some way (Long 1996: 43). This link between local and global dynamics brings new choices and dilemmas as to the use of modern science and technology - often as an alternative to local traditional knowledge and practice. As Long points out, this relationship is especially important for understanding the management of agro-ecological resource use, as problems having widespread consequences and ramifications are hence identified as global in nature. Yet, the solutions are often local in nature, requiring the localized management of natural resources. This is the case for food security and resource conservation, both having widespread consequences for people in a localized region such as Nepal, as on a world scale.

The distinction between 'local' and 'global' perspectives is not a hierarchical one in scale or comprehensiveness from Ingold's perspective; these involve very different modes of apprehension. In other words, the local is not a more limited or narrowly focused apprehension than the entire global perspective. The difference is that it is "based on active, perceptual engagement with components of the dwelt-in world, in the practical business of life, rather than on the detached, disinterested observation of a world apart" (Ingold 1993: 41). In Ingold's view, the local is constituted more as a series of nested spheres centred on a particular place. The quest for knowledge and understanding at the local originates in this "experiential centre" and it is through attentive engagement, entailed in the process of dwelling that the world is progressively

revealed to the knowledge-seeker (Ingold 1993: 41). Further, as Ingold points out, different centres will afford different views, so that “while there is only one global perspective indifferent to place and context, the number of possible local perspectives is potentially infinite” (Ingold 1993: 41).

Referring to Niklas Luhman’s view, Ingold explains the shift occurring with the spread of technology in relation to traditional cosmologies. The global perspective – represented through science, detached and abstract - has been used to legitimate the disempowerment of local people in the management of their resources. In fact, technological solutions have dominated traditional cosmologies where “the person [existed] at the centre of an ordered universe of meaningful relations” (Ingold 1993: 41). Modernisation and modern technology, by contrast, place human society and its interests outside and separate from the physical world, with human society creating the means to control the ‘physical world’. Thus, as cosmology gives way to technology, there is an undermining of cosmological certainties and a growing belief in and dependence upon technological solutions.

Within this context, anthropology’s role is to seek to contest unjust systems of domination (Giddens 1995: 277) and to grasp the interdynamics of globalizing and localizing processes. Getting beyond a neat global-local dichotomy, the challenge becomes one of appreciating how the different actors involved struggle to negotiate outcomes (Pottier 1999: 5; Long 1996: 46). In our analyses, we must go beyond the notion of externally-imposed impact and consider how local cultures work with or

against and reshape the so-called 'external' forces. The ethnographic implications of this approach entail rather than being viewed as passive subjects who "depend on anthropologists to frame, comment on, and analyse their actions for them," people are acknowledged as engaging in critical thinking and changing the conditions of their own existence. This requires a radical revision of the object (*sic*) of anthropological inquiry, as people are still informants from whom we extract information (Hobart 1995: 53). This entails carrying out interviews, situational analyses, life history recording, social network methods and so on that will allow the researcher to indicate the different responses to change by the actors themselves. The emphasis on the 'knower' and the individual's capacity to create and reinvent, tends to remove agents from structures and to replace determinism with voluntarism. It also reveals a far more complex and dynamic situation than a structuralist analysis at the macro level would allow (Gardner & Lewis 1999: 59).

Over the past decade, works critiquing the idea of development, a key feature of modernity - particularly those by Grillo & Stirrat (1999), Agrawal (1995), and Escobar (1984; 1994) - illustrate how "unreflexive application of western scientific rationality" has exacerbated rather than reduced inequalities in rural development. Development is "an enormously powerful set of ideas which has guided thought and action across the world over the second half of the 20th century" (Gardner and Lewis 1999: 6). It is still common today to regard development as economic growth. Within its objective of deliberately planned change comes the transformation of traditional societies into modern ones characterized by advanced technology, material prosperity and political

stability – promoting the modernisation paradigm. As Norman Long puts it, modernisation “visualises development in terms of a progressive movement towards technologically more complex and integrated forms of ‘modern society’” (Arce & Long 2000: 4) In the process, customary practices are relinquished or transformed. Also, social relations are disrupted or disembedded by market forces, new institutions and aspirations (Knauff 2002: 1). Furthering this view, Hobart points out that “economic development requires *inter alia* the modernization of technology through application of scientific knowledge” (1993: 5), thus overpowering the implicit power of situated local knowledge. Expert knowledge, Hobart explains generates systematic modes of ignorance due to the specialization and inherent fragmentation of development expertise.

Local farmers often know better than development planners how to work within the ecological and social contexts presented. For this reason, there is an increased interest in and awareness of the central importance of understanding how local culture is vital for more appropriate rural development and in the construction of sustainable strategies for resource conservation. Both development studies and the discipline of anthropology are struggling with the post-modern crisis and the need to push thought and practice away from

oversystemic models and dualities (traditional as opposed to modern; formal as opposed to informal; developed versus undeveloped) and in more creative directions. Likewise, critical engagement with processes of planned and non-planned change offers considerable potential for anthropologists interested in understanding the workings of discourse, knowledge and power, and in social transformation (Gardner and Lewis 1999: 2).

Key scholars (Appadurai 1990; Marglin 1990; Schuurman 1993; Escobar 1994; Grillo 1997) regard development discourse as the expansion of Western reason, with reasoned knowledge imbedded in the developmental language. Through hegemonic discourses societal practices, meanings, and cultural contents are appropriated into the modern realm subjecting them to Western forms of power-knowledge. Its power acts through normalization, the regulation of knowledges, and the moralization of issues (Peet and Watts 1996 :17). Laying bare the assumptions behind the 'interpretive grid' of development to show the relationship between knowledge, discourse and the reproduction of power is one of the most important tasks of contemporary anthropology (Gardner and Lewis 1999: 154).

Post-structuralist work on discourse originates in the rejection of modern conceptions of truth. This tendency originates with Enlightenment reason as reflecting and justifying a history of global supremacy rather than a universal path to absolute truth. Reason is an ideology and inherently hegemonic. Post-structuralist theory criticizes the modern "belief in rational humans speaking objective science"and "open[s] a space in which a wide range of beliefs, logics, and discourses can be newly valorized" (Peet and Watts 1996 :16). Theorists, such as Rorty (1979: 171) argue that knowledge as representation should be abandoned in favour of knowledge without foundations. "Knowledge as a matter of conversation and social practice, rather than as an attempt to mirror nature," echoes the alternative ecological perspectives of Hornborg, Ellen, and Hviding above. Each society has a *regime of truth* according to Peet and Watts, with

control of the “political economy of truth” constituting part of the power of the great political and economic apparatuses: these diffuse “truth,” particularly in the modern form of “scientific discourse,” through societies in a process infused with social struggles. In the post-structural view then, truths are statements within socially produced discourses rather than objective “facts” about reality. (Peet and Watts 1996: 13)

The emphasis in analysis on power-knowledge discourse, and space/place, make the idea of development perhaps the main theme in the Western discursive formation. From within a post-structuralist perspective, development discourse is recognized as a “uniquely efficient colonizer on behalf of central strategies of power” and – the professed ability “to make things better” is **the** main way of achieving power (Dubois 1991: 19).

Foucault’s analysis of knowledge/power relations serves to enrich our understanding of the dynamics of power. In his essays on governmentality, he attempts to show how the material and conceptual conditions essential for modern governance were put into place – including the development of specific techniques, knowledges and expertise. During the period of his study (16th and 17th Century), the family disappeared as the model for government and was replaced by the notion of a population with specific problems – wealth, health, longevity – to be recognized and managed (Foucault 1991: 99). Foucault’s notion of governmentality encompasses a particular way of thinking about problems and strategizing solutions:

Governmentality is concerned with specific discourses and practices, and with the particular rationalities which sustain them in the context of a given set of material and historical conditions.... [Rationalities] are forms and techniques of knowledge which tie people into those processes of modern living which are beyond their control but in which they are forced to participate, directly or indirectly. (Moore 1996: 12)

Foucault claims that “the criteria of what constitutes knowledge, what is to be excluded and who is designated as qualified to know involves acts of power.” Focusing on the context of development operating in the Third World, DuBois illustrates how development efforts integrate the most marginalized regions and groups – through subordinating local knowledge. “The acquisition of knowledge does not merely justify an intrusion of power, it *is* an intrusion of power” (DuBois 1991: 7). He illustrates how new technology and new techniques bring with them new knowledge and inequitable power relations. The effects of these “developmental disciplines” (the imposed changes), besides helping people to live more healthy or economically productive lives is significant.

First, the lives and lifestyles of the beneficiaries must become transparent: appropriate treatment is predicated upon an accurate diagnosis, which requires both comprehension and familiarity. Long before any actual programs are set in motion, a group or village becomes the object of relations of power emanating from the process of development. This object then becomes the object of knowledge. An investigation is made ... the forces of knowledge penetrate both public and private realms such as cropping patterns.... (DuBois 1991: 21).

After acquiring the knowledge, experts analyze it with reference to knowledge they already possess (established scientific discourse and Western perspectives) and begin to make recommendations, ultimately establishing a new norm or standard by which “success” will be measured. What was once a personal, family, or community matter becomes the territory of scientific investigation and ultimately a new normalizing prescription is established. An accompanying and “unspoken hierarchization” is produced between the types of practice or knowledge. These introductions multiply, resulting in the hierarchization of cultures that are now characterized according to the

categorization of “developed” and “developing”. Hence Foucault’s observation that this multiplicity of localized hierarchizations or judgments – his strategies of domination – occur from the bottom up (DuBois 1991: 27).

DuBois takes Foucault’s analysis one step further by pointing out that production as in the production of a norm *necessarily* implies a form of destruction as well:

In conjunction with the introduction of new power relations, the process of development entails an incomprehensible amount of destruction or, at the least, discrediting and subordination of local techniques, knowledges, practices, and lifestyles.... (Dubois 1991: 23)

In this way, development projects that bring in new techniques, expertise, and rationalities suppress other knowledges and ways of knowing. In the more alternative approaches to development that aim to build upon local technology and knowledge in order to preserve or reinforce them, destruction is mitigated. However, for DuBois, they still involve a judgment or validation of local knowledge according to “scientific” standards where their efficiency or other deemed important characteristic is demonstrated in terms of the development process. As such there is still a subordination of the local knowledge.

As discussed above, the concept *indigenous knowledge* has served to challenge the modernist discourse of development, particularly the role of western science which has contributed to the suppression of other ways of knowing and other forms of knowledge especially of minority, marginal, and once-colonized groups. The terms ‘indigenous’ and ‘local’ knowledge imply a discontinuity with and opposition to other

forms of knowledge, such as state, official, or scientific knowledge. This implicit dichotomy highlights the power differentials. As a result, attention has shifted away from the focus on the apparent dichotomy between indigenous and scientific knowledge to a focus on the processes by which

the different discourses, values and practices associated with the notions of 'modernity' and 'tradition' intersect and are intertwined in the everyday encounters and experience of people from different socio-cultural backgrounds (Arce & Long 2000: 203).

A critical analytical perspective in anthropology explores differential access to knowledge and power in the administration of individuals and communities (Moore, 1996: 12). However, as Moore points out, it is not the impact of the state on society that is at issue here; rather, it is the impact of governmentality on ways of living and on social institutions. Norman Long proposes a framework that may offer an important means for social anthropology to analyse encounters between actors and social systems. The notion of 'knowledge interface' places the analysis on role of the social actor within specific cultural contexts in which different actors and institutions negotiate knowledge repertoires. Interface according to Long (1998:1-2) refers to a

a critical point of intersection or linkage between different social systems, fields or levels of social order where structural discontinuities, based upon differences of normative value and social interest, are most likely to be found (Long 1990: 1-2).

The term 'interfaces' suggests an image of a point of contact between two surfaces as they meet. According to Long, focussing on this point enables us to analyse the way different social actors negotiate their interests within processes of development or processes of change through contact with modernity. The focus is on the dynamic

interaction and the potentially conflictual nature of social encounters that contain different knowledge frames and diverse forms of entitlements to power, where knowledge is seen as containing relations of power that exist between actors according to their position in society. They highlight the way different people attempt to organise their livelihoods within the social and institutional environments, and may generate confrontation as well as collaboration in situations of change. Negotiation takes place as an exercise in the accommodation of different objectives, diverse understandings within global policy and trends bringing disparities in power and resources to the fore. Placing knowledge at the centre of analysis through this focus on interfaces may highlight discrepancies of interest between global institutions and discourses and local social actors. Long posits guiding principles as follows:

Knowledge [then] emerges as a product of the interaction and dialogue between specific actors. It is also multi-layered ... fragmentary and diffuse rather than unitary and systemized. Not only is it unlikely therefore that different parties (such as farmers, extensionists, and researchers) would share the same priorities and parameters of knowledge, but one would also expect 'epistemic' communities (that is, those that share roughly the same sources and modes of knowledge) to be differentiated internally in terms of knowledge repertoires and application. (Long 1992: 274).

This analytical framework embodies a socially differentiated view where factors such as gender, ethnicity, class, age and religion are highlighted as important elements to knowledge issues. It is best therefore, to consider knowledge as "essentially a social construction that results from a particular context and is being reshaped by the encounters and discontinuities that emerge at the points of intersection between actors' 'lifeworlds'" (Long and Villarreal 1993: 160 quoted in Pottier 2003: 16). In this actor-oriented paradigm, people develop their own solutions by reacting to or redesigning

what they are confronted with. This approach focuses on “how knowledge is generated and transformed not in abstract, but in relation to the everyday contingencies and struggles that constitute social life” (Long 2001: 170). In this framework, knowledge is not viewed as bound by sources of power and authority. Rather it is “an outcome of the interactions, negotiations, interfaces and accommodations that take place between different actors and their lifeworlds.” It appreciates the transformative aspect inherent in knowledge creation. In addition, this approach enables the researcher to get beyond the simple, binary contrast between the perspectives of local communities and interventionists in order to grasp “the ways that different knowledge processes interrelate, and thus reinforce and transform each other, across the rural development interface”. (Long 2001: 170).

A post-modernist or post-structuralist perspective entails letting go of the dominance and control of unitary theories of progress, and the belief in scientific rationality. Objective ‘truth’ is replaced by emphasis on signs, images, and the plurality of viewpoints so that there is no single, objective account of reality, given the situatedness and positionality of each actor. “Post-modernism is thus characterised by a multiplicity of voices” (Gardner & Lewis 1999: 21). Even the notion of structural obstacles, as Long explains, must be regarded as primarily a fluid and thus transformable set of properties. Long and van der Ploeg elaborate further:

Such a notion of structure amounts to nothing more than a reification of what are considered to be ‘central tendencies’ and, as soon as heterogeneity is introduced in the analysis, this ‘structural approach’ withers away. ... In more substantive terms, structure can be characterized as an extremely fluid set of emergent properties, which on the one hand, results from the interlocking and/or distantiation of various actors’ projects, while on the other, it functions

as an important point of reference for the further elaboration, negotiation and confrontation of actors' projects (Long 2001: 61-3 quoted in Pottier 2003: 16).

An interface paradigm allows for diversity and cultural relativity, and disregards the possibility of common problems and thus common solutions (Gardner & Lewis 1999: 21). The end result is the primacy of localized experience, on locating particular voices, and deconstructing the discourse in the interfaces of the interdependent institutions.

More recently, there is a focus on the rebounding effect of knowledge in its diversity which serves to relocate the origins of beliefs and behaviour (Parkin 1995: 148). This occurs as people engage in 'counter-work', which involves the interplay of hegemonic and non-hegemonic discourses and values, emanating either from global or local scenarios (Arce & Fisher 2003: 79). Given the move away from the view of the centre and periphery, it is possible for local actors to acquire and reposition the expert knowledge within the context of everyday life. As such, people's everyday existence can be expressed in fusion, blending and counter-movements to expert or externally-constituted knowledge. The re-assembling of the recursive properties of entities and the redrawing of boundaries occur in such a way that new social forms emerge out of existing ones (Arce & Fisher 2003: 80). A similar dynamic elucidated by Parajuli assumes a pivotal role in the dynamics of social movements.

e. The Value of Social Movements

The link between environmental concerns and Third World poverty was sealed in such documents as the 1987 Brundtland Commission Report and the Rio Declaration of 1992. The new institutional forms of globalization and market integration coupled with more destructive technologies and substances in a climate of aggressive deregulation brought about a greater focus on environmentalism. In addition, the recognition of long-term catastrophic global tendencies and other changes in the last couple of decades has resulted in a resurgence of environmentalist concerns articulated explicitly in global terms (e.g., global warming, ozone depletion, biodiversity loss, biogenic hazards). The 1992 UN Conference on Environment and Development highlighted the importance of indigenous knowledge and local participation in decision-making and in local capacity building. It brought an acknowledgement of the notion of interdependence between the environment and development in various realms and sectors, such as agriculture and fishing. One of the principles (Principle 22) was devoted to the role of indigenous peoples:

Indigenous people and their communities and other local communities have a vital role in environmental management and development because of their knowledge and traditional practices. States should recognize and duly support their identity, culture and interests and enable their effective participation in the achievement of sustainable development.

This principle brought recognition of the *special knowledge* of indigenous peoples, making their role vital in environmental management and development. It advised states to support this *special knowledge (identity, culture and interests)*; and called for *the effective participation of indigenous peoples and their communities* in achieving more sustainable development. Signatories to the Convention on Biological

Diversity must regard indigenous peoples and their traditional knowledge as important resources in the movement toward a sustainable future, rediscovering and adapting the traditional methods of resource use and practices that have enabled them to live in relative harmony with their environments. Hence, the association of biodiversity conservation with indigenous people at the so-called “periphery” of the global system. The ineffectiveness of national agencies in both conservation of local resources and local human rights is increasingly recognized in development policy. As a result, there is a growing closer together of interest between the international movements for resource conservation and for local and indigenous community rights. The convergence of the two perspectives reinforces each movement and represents a powerful alliance to challenge current government decision-making and to find solutions through international law.

Local community empowerment has become a force for achieving the international goal of sustainability, and international oversight has become a means for ensuring the empowerment of local communities. A synergistic alliance of global and local interests that places sovereignty in a new context has formed. (Breckenridge 1992: 74 quoted in Dove 1996: 58)

Also of significance a couple years following the Earth Summit (in 1994), the UN proclaimed the International Decade of the World’s Indigenous People, intended as a springboard for the establishment of a permanent global forum of indigenous peoples and the promotion of a Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples. This was an important step in the development of what Niezen refers to as ‘Indigenism’, a global movement that aspires to promote and protect the rights of First Peoples. Specifically, indigenous peoples seek to correct “the historical deficit, to present their own experience alongside the exclusionary and incomplete accounts of the founding of states” (Niezen

2003: 23). The assertion by indigenous peoples of their rights to self-determination is their main point of defense against the assimilation goals of nation-states, which strive to alter or eliminate the social practices important to their collective identities. They are acting against the centralizing tendencies of states and international agencies that assert variations of social totalism (*ibid*, 218). Importantly, the movement derives much of its energy from a non-indigenous public which embraces indigenism as an expression of popular mistrust of the impacts of technology, the pace of life, and the search for spiritual expression in modern society (*ibid*, 52).

Thus, we see many environmental and indigenous organizations endorsing local communities' "rights" while indigenous peoples and other local communities adopt the language of international environmental protection, assuming the role of "trustees" on behalf of a broader community. As Dove points out (1996), this view posits a division of interest between nation states and corporations on the one hand, and local communities and international environmentalist and human rights activists on the other hand (*ibid*, 739). This drive to recover indigenous knowledge and representation of indigenous peoples are central aspects of *indigenous social movements*.

The engagement of post-structuralism and discourse theory (focused on the power-knowledge field) and the new perspectives of ecological anthropology discussed earlier in this essay, together result in what Peet and Watts refer to as "liberation ecology". The implication in this notion is to

recognize the emancipatory potential of what we will call the “environmental imaginary” and to begin to chart the ways in which natural as much as social agency can be harnessed to a sophisticated treatment of science, society and environmental justice. (Peet and Watts 1996: 13)

Thus, much of the focus of the environmental movement as with the indigenous movement is on the local perspective, often focusing on efforts to take resources (forestry, land) out of the marketplace and to construct “a sort of moral economy of the environment” (Peet and Watts 1996: 35) reflecting local demands for participation and justice. The label “environmental” covers an array of NGO movements focussing more broadly on livelihoods and justice. It is striking how indigenous rights, food security, and land rights movements cross-cut the environment-poverty axis. According to Escobar, these self-organizing movements exercise power outside the state arena and seek to create “decentred autonomous spaces” (1999). Likewise, ecological movements do not aim to create a new economics or present solutions to the modern world, as much as to find an alternative to development – one based on an understanding of the local and the knowledge(s) originating and being continually recreated under specific local conditions.

Non-government organizations working on environmental and indigenous issues represent the emergence of a new power domain, the shifting of basic social formations, as NGOs with little formal representation assume functions previously held by agencies of the state. Rural-developmental NGOs’ primary resource is their imbeddedness in specific localities; their authority is local, and they employ ‘participatory’ methods involving close ties to the community. NGOs also generate new knowledge and

disseminate it in efforts to counter the abstract, non-local sources of knowledge that government and corporations bring to developing rural areas. Highlighting the value of decisions appropriate to the community over profit, NGOs began to accrue authority that was 'moral' rather than scientific (Shrum 2000: 106).

New social movements challenge the state's authority and its claim to represent the people at the local level. Parajuli makes a brilliant analysis of the relations between new social movements in India, the role of the state, and the discourse of development. He points out that "new social movements" are sites of creating and regenerating subjugated knowledge. Through these movements, marginalized groups reassert their own knowledge and in the process struggle to reflect their autonomy and identity. Rather than pitting the First World as the exclusive dominating force of the Third World, in his analysis, it is the nation-state, a centralized government, that is enforcing totalitarian ambitions while claiming to be guardians of its citizens (Parajuli 1991: 175).

New Social Movements are distinct from traditional anti-systemic movements such as oppositional parties in two ways: First, the focus of these movements is not to capture state power through elections or a violent revolution, but rather to transform the nature of politics itself. Second, in these movements, antagonisms are expressed not only through class, but through multiple sites of power such as gender, ethnicity, caste and regional identity. (Parajuli 1991: 176)

As such, the drive to recover *indigenous knowledge* and to represent indigenous peoples are central aspects of *indigenous social movements*. In India, Parajuli's country of focus, the modern parameters of nationhood, citizenship and democracy are changing, while the identity and autonomy of subalterns are becoming an assertive element in the nationalist discourse (rather than an appendage). These movements integrate both state

and civil society, allowing for a dynamic relationship between ‘political’ and ‘social’ relations, parties, and movements. By affirming the local, the regional, and ethnic, actors of new social movements are striving to overcome both the economic exploitation and politico-cultural subordination by the state.

The beauty of these movements...is that the struggle for survival has grown into a struggle for regional autonomy as well as for the formation of ethnic and gender identities. (Parajuli 1991: 182)

There is an indigenous social movement throughout Southeast Asia centred on the conservation of biodiversity and food security, known as SANFEC². Today the role of NGOs in local communities is seen as the key to social transformation, through working with methodologies for social analysis and social action (Clammer 2000: 52). They are often the originators of the defined desirables of the community and the most efficient agency for achieving them. Moreover, they function as a ‘dialogic entity’ in two important ways: They encompass the view of intellectuals and those of other indigenes who constitute their wider membership through a process of mutual refinement of the specific challenges and goals. An NGO is also a point in society at which ‘knowledge’ is examined and defended and translated into ‘practice’. NGOs have a strategic role in mediating power and values. As such “they represent a genuine source of social knowledge and a particular framing of that knowledge” (Clammer 2000: 53).

In India, where the state is “mandated to unify the national economy, to establish a common national market, and to impose linguistic and cultural norms” (Parajuli 1991: 175), people are struggling to assert their autonomy and identity in response to their

² South Asia Network on Food, Ecology and Culture

subordination by the state. For Nepal, the impetus of the work of NGOs associated with biodiversity conservation and food security issues is rooted more in the continuing concrete problems of diminishing livelihood and the need to make their rapidly degrading resources sustainable. Where actors of new social movements are trying to reclaim their lost territory from a developmentalist-integrationist state, the limitations operating in Nepal may not be so much institutional as rooted in its own tribal past and other historical and cultural factors. Nepal is distinct in the sense that it is a country that has not been colonized and therefore is not engaged in challenging the state's developmentalist-integrationist authority and its claim to represent the people.

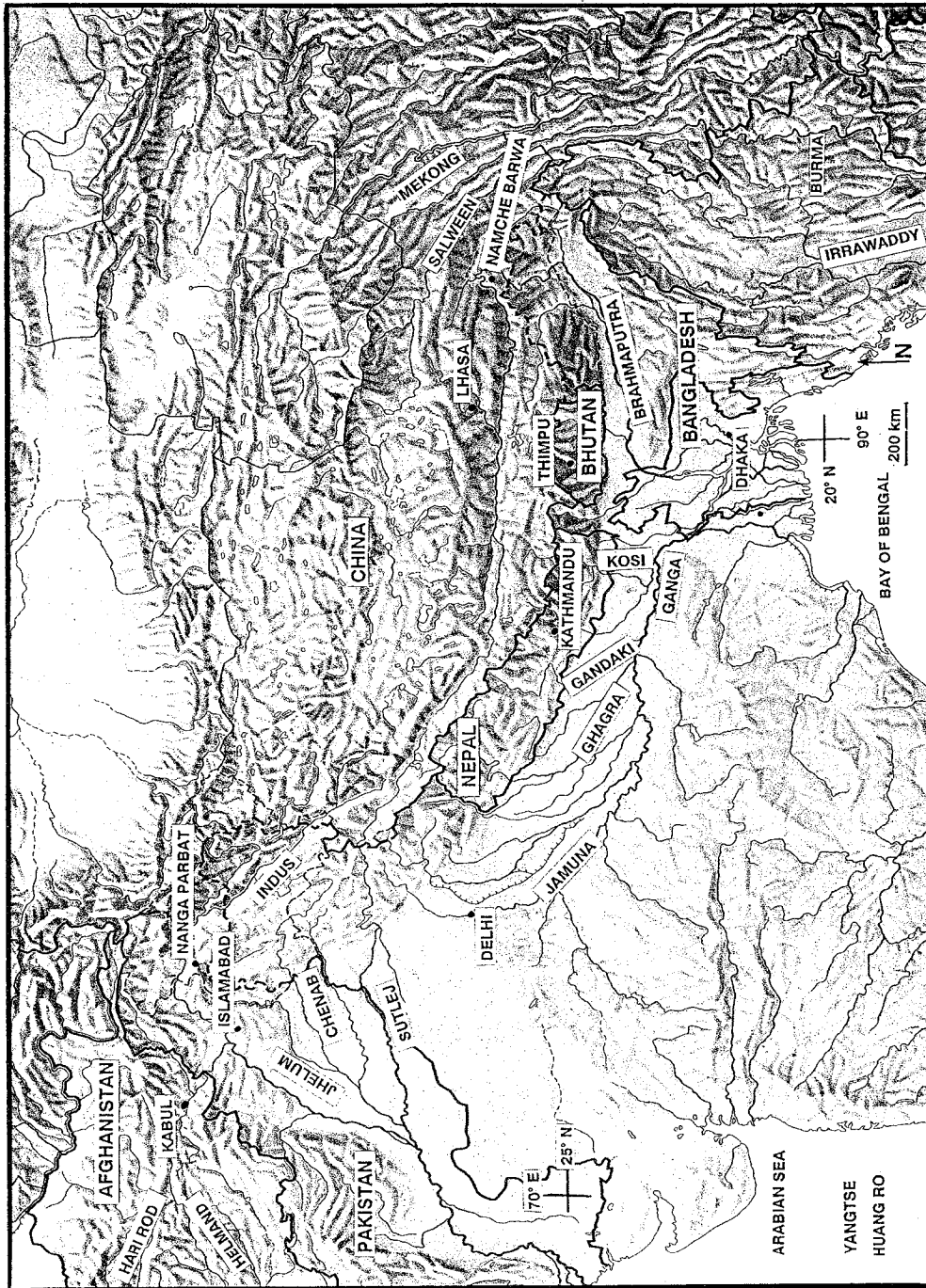


Figure 1: Map of Nepal situated in Southeast Asia

(from Ives & Messerli 1989)

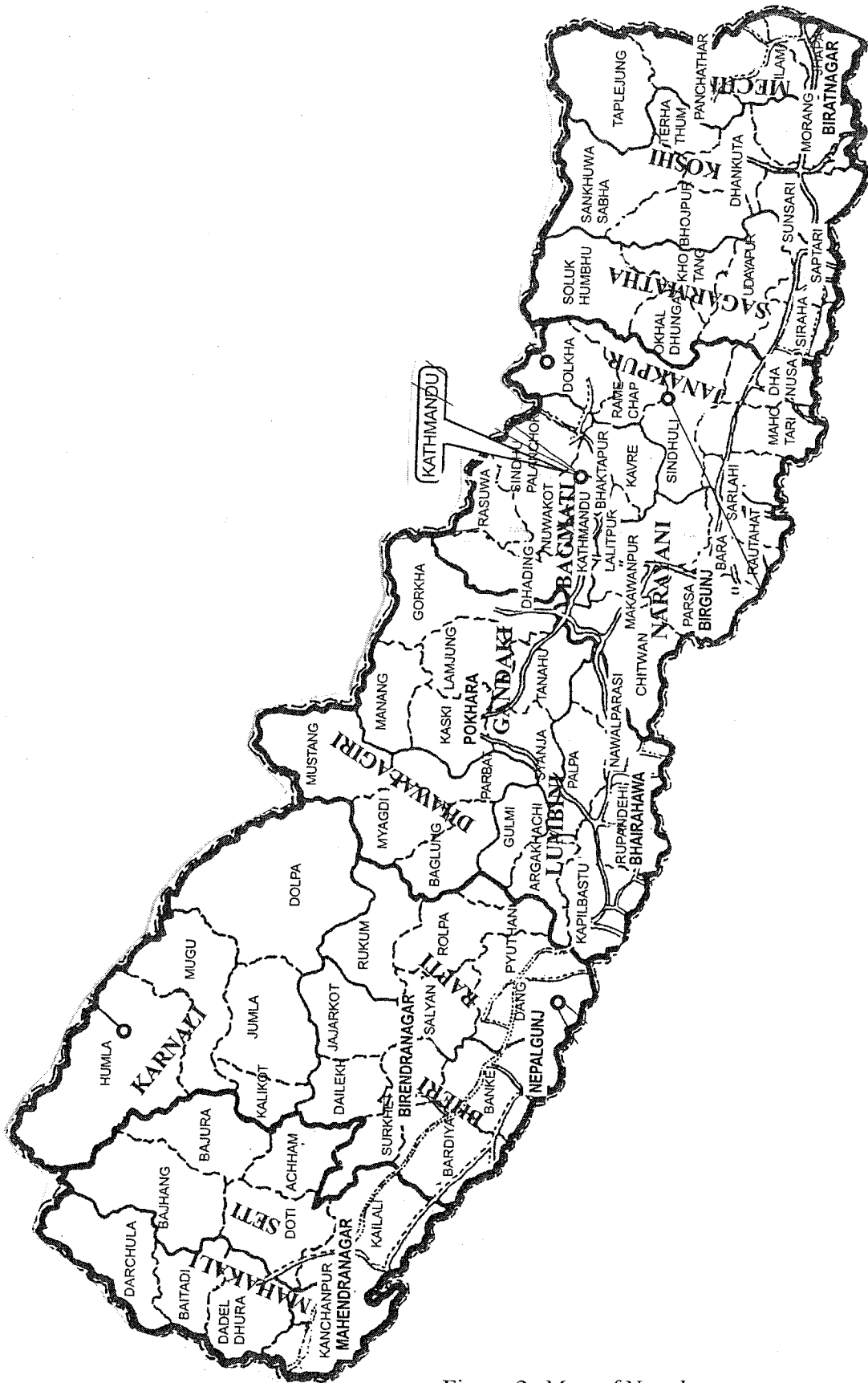


Figure 2: Map of Nepal

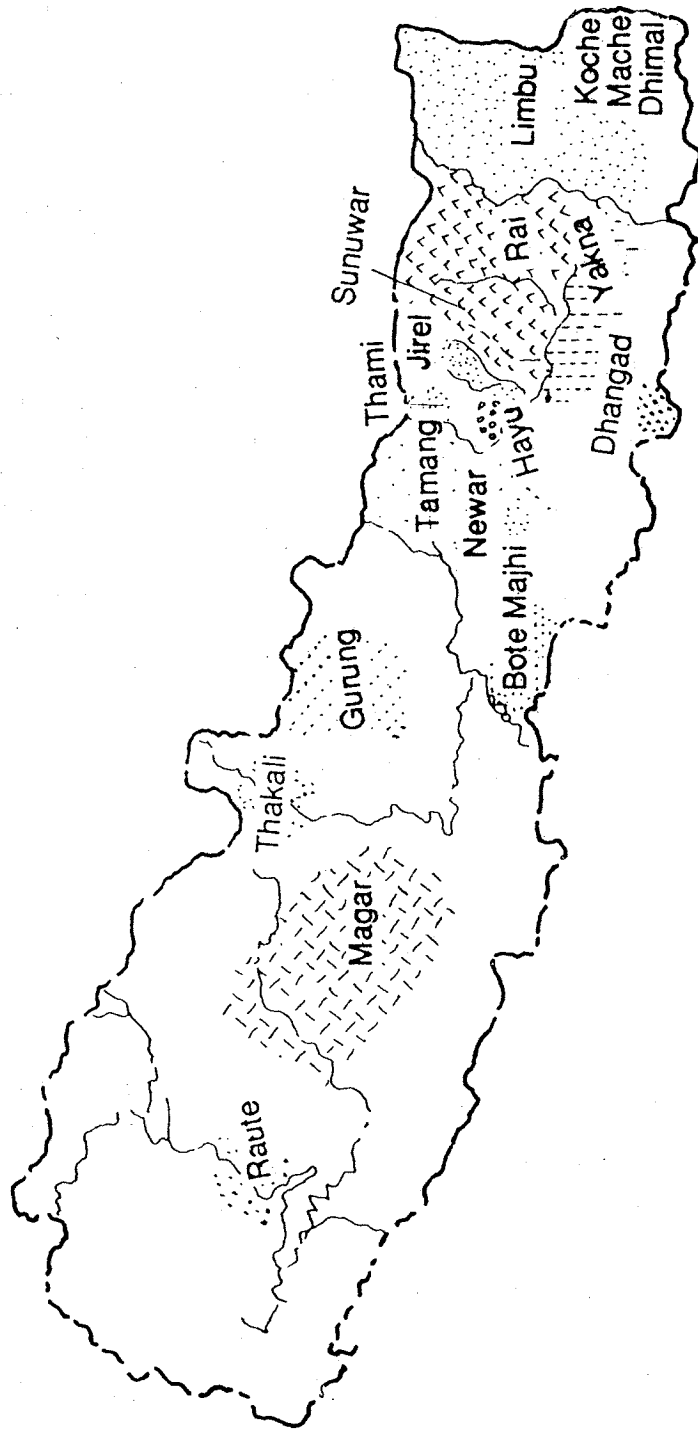


Figure 3: Major ethnic groups and their regions

(from Bista 1991)

Chapter II – Fieldsite and Methodology

a. Food security and resource conservation in Nepal

Nepal is a richly biodiverse region, with agriculture constituting about 60% of Nepal's economy and employment for 91% of the total population (*Discovering a Hidden Centre of Diversity – Nepal*). Yet it is estimated that 49% (statistics from 1991-92) live below the poverty line, with the majority of these (98%) living in the rural areas. Where Nepal exported a surplus of food up until the 1980s, it now cannot meet its own needs in food production (Ives and Messerli 1989; Bista 1991; Macfarlane 1994; USC 1997). The formerly rice surplus middle hills have become grain deficit areas (Macfarlane 1994: 107). In the hilly and mountainous regions of Nepal, ecological conditions present some challenges: landslides and built terraces make it difficult to grow over large areas. In an environment lacking large areas of cultivable land, communities use a large number of scattered plots in order to extract the maximum yield from an inhospitable land. In some areas with low valleys cut deeply into the tangle of hills and sheltered from extremes of climate, species of rice and millet can be grown in limited quantities. At higher elevations, such as in Rasuwa, barley, wheat, and potatoes provide the staple food (Murray 1975: 244). Rural households have found it difficult to maintain livelihoods from their own production in recent years due mainly to population growth, degradation of the resource base (land and forest), and soil erosion (Adhikari & Bohle 1999: 2). This has led to increased deforestation and other environmental stresses as well as large-scale migration from rural areas to the cities. This massive degradation of the Himalayan environment is resulting in disastrous downstream flooding in Northern India and Bangladesh (Messerschmidt 1996: 232).

Livelihood is defined as “the command an individual, family, or other social group has over an income and/or bundles of resources that can be used or exchanged to satisfy its needs” (Blaikie 1994 quoted in Adhikari & Bohle 1999: 4). In order to maintain their livelihoods, people are shifting their emphasis from subsistence farming to other sources of income that might serve the needs of the urban and wealthier households and supplying them quality village products such as milk, ghee, herbs, wild foods, timber, and stone slate. They consume cheap and low quality food products while selling home produced quality goods at higher prices. This diversification strategy has become possible as a result of greater integration of rural areas with the national and international marketing channels. More recently, as will be discussed later, tourism is also a viable means to fill the gap income. Vulnerability to food insecurity refers to the ability of people and societies to cope with their exposure to risk. Greater risk of vulnerability in the current situation is attributed mainly to the decline of extended families and the traditional patron-client relationship being gradually replaced with off-farm wage labour. In addition, the rising cost of contingencies (including agricultural inputs) and access to resources (land, labour) contribute to vulnerability. In 1957 the Nepalese government nationalized the forests in “a misguided effort to protect them” (Ives and Messerli 1989: 61) replacing the indigenous forms of forest management. Where forests and wasteland had been available, landless and marginal people could keep animals and rely on forest products (containing uncultivated wild foods, firewood, and fodder) for their livelihoods. More importantly, the breakdown of traditional patterns in all aspects of life, including agriculture accounts for resource degradation and

food insecurity (Ives and Messerli 1989). This will be illustrated through several studies cited in this work.

Ethnographic studies of Nepal have generally focused on one of the many ethnic groups residing within this ecologically diverse country, which evoke three main divisions: The Tibetan-like peoples, including the famous Sherpa, inhabit the higher reaches of the Himalayas along the borders of Tibet. The Tibeto-Burman speaking ethnic groups who migrated from regions of Southeast Asia, reside in the mid-hills range in altitudes from low interior to 8,000 feet in elevation. These two regions include the ethnic groups (from west to east): Magar, Sherpa, Gurung, Thakali, Tamang, Sunuwar, Rai and Limbu, and these have attracted anthropological attention. (See *Figure 3* on page 59 for major ethnic groups and their regions.) Another group, the Newar, reside in the Kathmandu valley, and include farmers, traders, crafts people and city-builders. Intermingled with these ethnic groups are the pervasive Indo-Nepalese hill peoples, who are divided into their own Hindu caste hierarchy: the high-caste Bahun (Brahman), the Thakuri and Chetri, both considered “warrior” groups, and the lower-castes of Kami (Blacksmiths), Damai (Tailors) and the Sarki (leatherworkers) (Holmberg 1989: 12).

Most of these *jat* (kind, tribe, caste, or clan) cannot be traced back to a presumed original indigenous state with great historical depth and continuity of form. Rather, they have acquired their identities as Nepal was consolidated into a unified state. Members of these groups often had little or no connection prior to the consolidation of Nepal (Holmberg 1989: 14). For example, the Tamang and the Sherpa have incorporated others

in their cultural groups. The Tibeto-Burman speaking groups of the mid-hills of Nepal have come to be infused by caste principles into their egalitarian worlds as an influence of the hierarchy generated in the Brahmanical differentiation of groups. The Tamang residing in the border regions, on the other hand, were among these groups characterized by an insular or “tribal” character. As will be discussed later, they turned in upon themselves, in a process of involution. Thus, the view of distinct and separate groups with their own language and customs “emerged in the Western imagination as the home of autonomous ‘tribal’ groups...often romanticized for their elevation and remoteness.” (*ibid.*, 12).

The first comprehensive anthropological works in Nepal focused on the Sherpa (carried out by Furer-Haimendorf in 1964 and 1972), the Gurung and the Magar, giving an overview of the economic and cultural characteristics including trade. The urban Newar and the Indo-Nepalese groups have remained relatively unstudied. Studies of the famous Sherpa trekking guides living in the Mount-Everest region, tend to examine their view of human nature, their relationship with the mountain environment, and their cosmology. Sherry B. Ortner’s study of the Sherpa’s interactions with their clients, the *sahibs*, in *Thick Resistance: Death and Cultural construction of agency in Himalayan Mountaineering* is one example.

There has been very little anthropological research undertaken in the north-central region of Nepal. One of the few ethnographies of that region which focuses on the Tamang is Holmerg’s *Order in Paradox*. This work carried out between 1977 and

1987 provides an indepth study of the religion and ritual life of the Tamang. The co-existence of the Buddhist groups within the Hindu sociopolity in Nepal and the fascinating version of Buddhism which remained amonastic, mixed with shamanism and animism, lacking a rationalizing ideology of Buddhism in state societies, makes for intriguing anthropological analysis. Although he uses a fictive name for the village in which he studied, Tamdungsa, its location northwest of Kathmandu near the Trisuli River, would situate it just south of where I carried out fieldwork. His view of Tamang religious ritual as “a system of balanced complementarities” existing within the Hindu sociopolity provides a “model of” and “model for ‘reality’” that shapes Tamang experience and orients action (Holmberg 1984: 7). His ethnography provides extensive background on the emergence of the Tamang as a historical group in state formation. Another study focusing on Tamang religious ritual is Hofer’s studies of the Tamang during the 1970s, on Tamang Shamanism.

Other areas of interests in anthropological research has been on communities living in the highest regions of the Himalayas. These include Fisher’s *Himalayan Traders* (1986) carried-out in northwestern Nepal which focuses on the economic and cultural self-sufficiency of isolated communities living in a challenging environment. Further, as Fisher explains, he was drawn by the “interstices of the multi-ethnic society of Nepal” and a need to explain the region’s “convoluted and changing integration” in the Tarangpur society of the Magar. He was concerned with “the mechanisms that maintain ethnic boundaries between the mediating mountain peasants and other groups with which they regularly interact” (Fisher 1986: 2).

The ethnographic work of Donald A. Messerschmidt is significant because he studies the more traditional systems of resource management currently being replaced by government institutions. These works cover community forestry management and traditional forms of cooperation, such as *Dhikurs*, the rotating credit associations, and *Nogar*. His work is geared to incorporating appropriate and innovative practices in resource management and community development. Other important anthropological analyses examine the failure of development initiatives and the continuing resource crisis in Nepal. These include Alan Macfarlane's extensive studies of agriculture and resource use and Ives and Messerli's indepth analysis of the complex factors at play, including culture change, in Himalayan environmental degradation in *The Himalayan Dilemma: Reconciling development and conservation* (1989). Most notable is Dor Bahadur Bista's infamous *Fatalism and Development: Nepal's Struggle for Modernization* (1991). According to Macfarlane, "Bista, an insider, can say things which no outsider could say" (1994: 115). Working at an early age with the distinguished anthropologist Christoph von Furer-Haimendorf, he produced the standard survey, *The Peoples of Nepal* in 1967. He distils over 30 years of life experience in this important work, with advice on the manuscript from Ernest Gellner.

Pokhrel and Willet's *History of an indigenous community management organization* (1996) is notable in terms of understanding an alternative form of local leadership and framework for local governance. The authors describe a system of decentralized self-governance that existed in Nepal up until 1960 in the Hindu Kingdom of Nepal. Referred to as "local indigenous organizations" (LIOs), they functioned

“traditionally within an holistic cosmological context which was universally understood and respected” (*ibid*, 109). LIOs provided a framework for the management of natural resources, advising on the production of medicinal herbs and healthy food. They were responsible for managing almost the entire spectrum of social activity including a legal system which was “implemented consistently, impartially and appropriately according to the customary values of Hindu law” (*ibid*, 109). This system originated with the longstanding tradition of local self-government that was established from the Vedic era at least. Vedic texts describe ‘multi-sectoral’ community management roles and responsibilities of five well-respected elders of a local area, along with the procedures for their selection. These organizations headed by five elders were called *Panchayat* (*pancha*, five; *ayat*, house), an organization composed of five and chosen through a process of public consensus in each village. The leaders possessed knowledge or wisdom to share with others and were dedicated to fostering social, economic, cultural and spiritual welfare and harmony in their communities and were referred to as ‘*Janne*’, a Nepali word which means ‘knower’. *JanneBa* means ‘KnowerFather’ and conveys a deep level of confidence and respect. The tradition of *panchayat* and the indigenous knowledge associated with their functioning was handed down from generation to generation, with LIOs forming the local units of self-sufficient governance and the backbone of the larger system. These persisted during periods of oligarchy in which local government was left in a condition of “benign neglect” permitting LIOs to continue their community management role largely undisturbed (Pokhrel & Willett 1996:110).

This all changed in 1969 when the authoritarian government put in place an ‘Organization Control Act’ which eliminated all organizations in Nepali society other than those formally registered with and sponsored by the ruling system. The king’s totalitarian system “[took] the name of the local indigenous organization of the ancient past, and distort[ed] what had been a simple and effective system of local governance prescribed in the Hindu texts by applying it as the ‘partyless *Panchayat* system” (*ibid*, 110). *Panchayat* now refers to the centralized, four-tier legislature – village, district, zonal, and national – a system of organization inspired by communist China. Thus, according to Pokhrel & Willett,

Nepal’s indigenous *panchayat* organizations were replaced by the king’s *panchayats*, and the respected local elders steeped in indigenous spirituality, culture and knowledge were substituted by cadres of people screened by a central politburo for their loyalty to the ‘palace clique’(1996:110).

Unlike other rural societies whose cultures were disrupted as a result of imperialist contact, Nepal remained an independent state on the fringe of the British empire throughout the colonial era in South Asia. From 1846 to 1951 the country was ruled by a succession of prime ministers of the elite Rana family. Under their rule, the country became a national political-economy through the extraction of resources, tribute, and feudal labour. The 1950-51 revolution overthrowing the Ranas was inspired by India’s successful campaign for independence. This change of power was energized by a vision of democracy and by a desire to modernize and develop a society that for so long had been systematically impoverished under the Rana oligarchy (Pigg 1992: 497). Reversing the isolationist policy of the Ranas, the new government invited international aid and enlisted the help of western, industrialized countries which in the post-war era had just

begun to distribute foreign aid. Rather than the residues and scars of imperialist presence, for Nepal development was invited and became the overt link between itself and the outside world. Hence, the Nepali word *bikas* which means development is imbued with meanings particular to Nepalese society. At the same time that development has linked Nepal with the rest of the world, this different, more profoundly social meaning, is woven into the fabric of local life and patterns of meaning related to status in Nepali society.

In her article describing social representations of development in Nepal, Stacey Pigg (1992) illustrates how Nepal identifies itself as an underdeveloped country in relation to the developed world. *Bikras* is the term through which Nepalis understand their relationship to other parts of the world. It also becomes the idiom through which the relationship between local communities and other places is expressed. In her analysis, all the individual villages in Nepal are constituted in the Nepalese imagination as one generic village which has no *bikras*, as villagers are seen as fettered by custom and blinded by tradition. Some places have more *bikras*, connoting things such as new breeds of goats and chickens, electricity, schools, medicines. In this way, *bikras* also demarcates social territories and identifies social positions, the points by which people orient themselves socially. Embedded in the usage of *bikras* is what Pigg calls “an ideology of modernization: the representation of society through an implicit scale of social progress” (Pigg 1992: 499). Further, the village becomes reified as the locus of Nepal’s underdevelopment. It is seen as a space in which people are imprisoned in what is considered an inferior and outmoded way of life. According to Pigg, these social

categories of development are not imposed from outside, but assimilated into the ways they see themselves and their relations to other Nepalis (Pigg 1992: 507).

The growing population in Nepal, the accelerating resource degradation in the Himalayan mountains where farming is carried-out and changes in traditional trading patterns, combined with lack of access to resources (common land, forest, wild food) has resulted in instances of starvation in rural areas of Nepal. At the same time, Nepal is recognized as a country uniquely rich in all aspects of biodiversity. The complex topography and climatic variations in the mountain regions and the aged agriculture/forest systems have generated immense diversity in flora and fauna. Lack of awareness, lack of planning and conservation policy is causing forests to shrink and the subsequent loss in biodiversity at ecosystem, species and genetic levels.

In order to minimize the use of expensive and degrading chemical inputs to agriculture which exacerbates the problems described above, it is essential that effective interventions build on existing resource management systems and principles. This would entail learning about and valuing traditional local practices, making farmers more aware of what they know, and nurturing an understanding of the impact of various alternatives so that they can make decisions that will maintain their own resource base, consequent livelihood, and continue to reproduce their cultures. Resource management should ideally reflect continuity with and be guided by existing forms of management, indigenous knowledge and practices, and popular participation.

b. USC Canada Nepal

USC Canada-Nepal is one overseas branch of the Unitarian Service Committee founded by Dr. Lotta Hitschmanova in 1945. Dr. Hitschmanova initially focused on developing simple and effective solutions for addressing the suffering of poor and war-affected children and families. Today USC Canada and its international partners in Nepal, Bangladesh, Indonesia, Mali, and Timor Leste continues to provide innovative, direct, and appropriate responses to the development needs articulated by poor communities (*2002/2003 Annual Report*, USC Canada). Their strategy focuses on enabling the people with whom they work to define their own development priorities, participate in provision of their own services, and to build capacity for both social and economic infrastructure.

USC Nepal has been active in Nepal since 1977 and works with 75,000 people in 20 Village District Communities in five districts of Nepal. Their vision statement reads:

We believe that sustainable development requires the optimum use of local resources in terms of both people and materials. We believe that the heritage of wisdom and knowledge found in traditional cultures is an invaluable resource that must be conserved and enhanced for appropriate modern use. This calls for recognition, understanding and cooperation of the community of scientists and learned people with traditional people who are practitioners with time proven knowledge and skills. This partnership joins people together in the common cause of human development. We believe that "Poverty" is a fundamental barrier to human development and must be eradicated. We believe that building up the capacity of people is a vital component of USC work and the strengthening of people's organizations is essential to overcome poverty. (<http://www.uscnepal.org/>)

The objective of USC Nepal's "Rasuwa Civil Society's Empowerment Program" is to promote and support the rural civil societies (community-based organizations) in

order to meet the community needs and to build their capacity to achieve self-reliance. During the early phase of this program (the last two years), field workers have striven to encourage people to participate in the overall development process through education and raising awareness regarding sustainable agriculture and local seed conservation, agro-enterprises, micro-credit, and sanitation. (USC Nepal: *Rasuwa Civil Society's Empowerment Program – Program Submission 2003/2004*).

C. Fieldwork Methodology

Among all the other terms vying for prominence in development anthropology, *indigenous knowledge* has the widest currency (Sillitoe 2003; Purcell 1998) and is often instrumentalized and idealized by development experts (Antweiler 1998: 469) for finding practical, simple and local solutions to problems. In this context, the role of *indigenous knowledge* is clearly stated:

This requires serious engagement with peoples' knowledge systems, understanding the interconnectedness of the technical and the symbolic, and the provision of sufficient social and cultural context" (Ellen 2003: 255).

Anthropology can contribute to this understanding by setting such inquiries within a broad cultural context, and not merely consider technical issues as is the case in development studies that focus on 'indigenous technical knowledge' (Sillitoe 1998). Even though *indigenous knowledge* is considered a resource in development, its utilization for development remains ambiguous. This is due to its uneven distribution through a local community, dispersed throughout a culture depending on one's standing, class, gender, and education. As stated above, it is always partial, not uniformly distributed and therefore cannot be easily revealed as a comprehensive knowledge

system. Another obstacle is presented where the activities based on local knowledges may not be sustainable or socially just (Antweiler 1998: 469).

I contacted USC Nepal in Kathmandu by email in January of 2004 expressing my interest in learning from an NGO working on documenting *indigenous knowledge* that is deemed important to resource conservation and food security. Their website indicated they had a resource centre, that they were working to reinforce traditional practices, and documenting the traditional knowledge of the communities they serve. Having worked in a centre for alternative agriculture myself since 1989, I was aware that many rural communities in less developed countries were actively documenting their traditional knowledge. My original motivation was to analyse the type of information that was recorded in the documentation where I expected to find clues as to the values and practices that guide Nepalese farmers. Was it to safeguard and validate the practices of the farmers, exchange with other communities, or to develop a knowledge-base from which to do research into improving their practices and increasing successful yields? Secondly, I wanted to understand the kinds of struggles that farmers are faced regarding food security and biodiversity conservation. I offered my skills as a writer and editor in exchange for the opportunity to accompany their fieldstaff in the local farmers. In response, I received an invitation to accompany their staff working in the Rasuwa region.

My field research was to begin in Dunche, a village located 175 kilometers north of Kathmandu in the mid-hills region of Rasuwa between. The plan was to join up with Ananda and Nunta, the two USC fieldworkers who assist farmers to develop the capacity to select, collect and save the seed varieties indigenous to the region. They also provide advice to farmers on non-herbicide and ecological pest-control practices as even in the remote areas of Nepal, there is always the desire to go for the higher-yield varieties of plants that ultimately require costly inputs. Anunta is well-educated in social work and speaks English quite well. I was to learn about USC's Civil Society Program first-hand and in the process, to observe USC fieldworkers' interactions with farmers. I would interview both Anunta and Nanda about their experiences with these farming communities as well as the farmers with translation where necessary. Due to unexpected circumstances, I was not able to join Anunta and Nanda early on, or to remain in Rasuwa for an extended duration. The demonstrations that were taking place regularly in Kathmandu demanding a more democratic government were causing roadblocks and sporadic public transport services. When the right time came, I made arrangements and took the bus to Dunche on my own.

As described in my account in the following chapter, I would remain outside of the conventional, bounded metaphorical field that I expected to work within. Therefore, I began to look at every context I encountered in Kathmandu, Pokhara, Gutlang, and Dunche as a possible interface that would serve to reveal how different knowledge systems collide and interact. This would enable me to speculate the way different social actors negotiate their interests in processes of change through contact with practices

associated with modernity. As Long proposes (1992: 274), knowledge emerges as a product of the interaction and dialogue between specific actors. Through such analyses, one would ask, what differences occur, what 'epistemic' communities are differentiated in terms of knowledge repertoires and application and which are being reshaped through negotiations? What important factors such as gender, ethnicity, class, age and religion are highlighted as important elements within knowledge issues?

My fieldwork brought me into three different contexts that could reasonably constitute knowledge interfaces: 1) I attended a workshop held by Canada's International Development Research Centre on a participatory Social Analysis System, a method of empowerment attended by a dozen Nepali NGOs. 2) I interviewed USC Nepal fieldstaff working on issues around food security and biodiversity conservation in the Rasuwa region of Nepal. 3) I visited a Tamang village and had the opportunity to learn about a newly designed cultural tourism program to preserve Tamang culture in the high-hill region of the Himalayas.

Agricultural production accounts for the greatest proportion of employment in the country and in terms of "sustainable development" it takes a central place. I unexpectedly discovered other sectors which also shed light on the fragile state of biodiversity and supplemented with extensive secondary sources the ineffectiveness of development efforts. Most importantly, the question of what constitutes traditional or indigenous knowledge became relevant. As it turned out, the chance meetings that occurred served to provide a multi-local and multi-dimensional impression of some

aspects of Nepali society and culture. My exploration of the conservation of traditional knowledge in the mountainous region of Rasuwa, brought me at almost every turn to an unexpected opportunity to learn about the complexity of Nepali society and its culture. For the next few weeks I was entirely adrift, outside of my imagined metaphorical “field” and rather than have a bounded, territorial community to study, my experiences were random and diverse. Nonetheless, each linking up to give a broad perspective of contemporary cultural construction in Nepal. My thinking developed progressively, twigged in each case by a new subject, a new aspect of an instance of global impact, the impact of a development initiative and response at the local level.

Chapter III – Encounters in the Field

a. *Into the field – The context*

I arrived in Kathmandu on the 19th of April, a couple days before the start of the IDRC Workshop¹ on the Social Analysis System which was being held at The Hotel Sherpa just on the edge of the Thamel district and about half a kilometer from the Kathmandu Guest House. Thamel is the heart and soul of the city centre, a maze of narrow streets heavily clustered with tiny hotels, shops, restaurants and trekking outfitters. There is an intensity to it: the noise of cars, rikshaws, and diesel-operated three wheelers visibly producing a cloud of black smoke and diesel fume pollution. Creativity and patience are required to navigate the district's narrow, crowded, often unmarked streets strewn with rubbish, as you jump to the side narrowly escaping being swiped, and onto the threshold of sellers' stalls, incessantly pushing their pashmina shawls, clothing, bags, jewelry, and camping gear.

Within a few paces of heading out the gates of the Kathmandu Guest House to make my way to The Hotel Sherpa, I am approached by a young boy, about 15 years old. He is tall and slight, having black hair, large dark eyes and a submissive look. He is wearing loose slacks and a tee-shirt, western-style clothing, and carries a cloth packsack on his back. He could have been one of my daughter's friends stopping by after school. As soon as I notice that he is walking beside me, he quickly but in a timid voice asks me if I want a shoe-shine. I was wearing an old pair of black leather sandals which made me wonder if he were joking. I laughed and replied "No thanks" as I hurried along past all

¹ Workshop on the Social Analysis System: Kathmandu, Nepal, April 20-23, 2004. Hosted by National Zoonoses and Food Hygiene Research Centre and sponsored by International Development Research Centre (IDRC), Canada.

the shopkeepers hanging out in front of their stalls. But he continued to walk along beside me, mostly looking down and occasionally, tentatively glancing towards me. Finally asking, “What country?” “I’m from Canada” I replied. “Ah Canada” and the beginning of our brief encounter. He said he didn’t know where it was, but had heard of it. He then asked me where I was going. I told him that I was going to a meeting at the Hotel Sherpa and asked him if he knew where the hotel was located. He then proceeded to lead me in a very purposeful way through the meandering streets. When we arrived at the intersection of Kantipath, he pointed me in the direction of the Hotel. I was about to give him a tip “for having shown me the way”, but he objected with an offended look saying, “No, I don’t want any money.”

Representatives from 14 local NGOs and one from India were gathered in the main dining room of the Sherpa Hotel where the *Workshop on the Social Analysis System (SAS)* took place over the next four days. Participants were to learn about a methodology for assessing the social aspects of issues within their communities, mainly focused on environment and food security. According to the workshop leader, the SAS approach claims to move beyond the “technical fix approach to development”. This methodology invites participants to get to the root of social constructs in order to understand how knowledge systems function – thus revealing power relations and conflicts operating in the social dimension. It gives special emphasis to agency and analyzing the role of key stakeholders (groups of people who can influence or benefit from change) and the possible paths to finding solutions. The workshop leader explains, “By becoming aware of the social constructs, you can learn and apply new perspectives.

You can test your constructs against reality and develop new relationships among domains, problems, and constructs.” It is an attempt to reconstruct people’s knowledge of nature and society and to bring out what is culturally or socially distinct about each local knowledge perspective, in order to make more informed choices.

Among the participants in the workshop is Ravi from the Academy of Development in India. Ravi heads The South Asia Network on Food, Ecology and Culture (SANFEC), the leading Network in the area of food security and biodiversity conservation in Southeast Asia. He is very articulate about the importance of saving traditional varieties of local seeds and its far-reaching impacts on the food system and food security². There is much discussion about public taste around selection of seed varieties, suggesting a growing preference for modern varieties. I had the opportunity to interview Ravi at the end of the first day. I was interested in having his views on the role of indigenous knowledge in food security and resource conservation. I wondered whether in India the indigenous or tribal groups are marginalized or valued for the contribution they can make to protecting biodiversity.

Framing his analysis in the historical context of India, Ravi explained that there have been major changes in agriculture in India since the Public Distribution System was instituted in 1951. The Public Distribution System of food grains was retained as a deliberate social policy by India after being reintroduced. It was extended to all rural areas suffering from chronic food shortages and millions of India's poor derive direct or

² The following definition from the World Food Summit, 1996: “Food Security exists when all people, at all times, have physical and economic access to sufficient, safe and nutritious food to meet their dietary needs and food preferences for an active and healthy life.

indirect benefits from the very existence of this system. The government was distributing rice, Ravi explains, so that “Today people are eating only rice. This displaces the vegetables and pulses. When the varieties change, the food habits change. The answer to conserving biodiversity in the food system is to start at the local level, to preserve local varieties, to work with mixed cropping systems, and many benefits will accrue.” Ravi delivers his analysis in a very authoritative way, always with a smile. “Today those other grains are sold outside India. Also, more land is now devoted to cotton for export purposes. This is detrimental because 60% of all pesticides are used for cotton as farmers attempt to get higher and higher yields.” Ravi concludes: “This is Man trying to overcome barriers. It is against nature. There must be some limits to production.”

I am happy to meet the USC staff members participating in the Workshop: the two farmer-fieldworkers (Sushil and Dinesh), the office administrator (Ramesh), and a sociologist, a consultant for USC Nepal office. I joined this group in the workshop exercises. Together we carried-out the exercises for the social analysis of the identified problem: *Disappearing indigenous seed varieties in Nepal*. Factors in our force-field analysis included population growth; a taste for ‘modernity’ among the public; multi-national corporations; government subsidies to support cash crops; and high-yield variety (HYV) seeds, and inputs. We were asked to utilize the SAS methodology to explore possible solutions. This involved identifying an action or a set of actions that an organization could implement in less than three months, along with two factors that are unpredictable, and two factors that could have a great impact. The unpredictable factors

included market price and demand; and secondly, the unexpected activities of the Maoists, an insurgency group terrorizing the countryside in some regions. The selected activity was to be a seed fair and a date was set along with ways of communicating the event to the local farmers.

It wasn't long before I began to notice a pattern in the dialogue exchange at my table. As we were guided through the workshop exercises, the response at our table was usually silence. Eventually I noticed that the two farmers would never speak before the administrator, Ramesh – despite the fact that they, and not he, had the knowledge of the farming situation and practices. Once the conversation had started, Anita could make a contribution, but they seemed to resist her ideas. I wondered how much this exchange was determined by the caste-based hierarchy operating Nepal, outlawed in 1957 but continuing in varying degrees and contexts.

Every morning as I left the Kathmandu Guest House for Hotel Sherpa, Bikkie met me at the gates, and each time told me a little more about his family life. His younger sister was in school learning English; but he could not study because he had to work. Though he insisted that shining shoes was the only work he could do, I never saw him shining anyone's shoes. His older sister and her child lives with them because her husband has gone to India for work. They have a leak in their roof. On the second day he asked me if I would buy some milk for his sister. I answered, “yes, of course,” recalling the small half-pint plastic bags of milk I'd bought for myself, and asked, “Where can we buy milk nearby?” He quickly led me to the small store on the other side of the street.

Upon entering the store, he walked directly to where large cans of powdered milk were stored on an upper shelf. He grabbed one, and as he turned to head over to the counter, he took down a box of cookies and tossed them onto the counter as well. The cashier totaled up the milk and the cookies, 570 rupees (about \$12), more money than I had on me. I was a little surprised at the total cost. He put the cookies back. We left and I gave him the milk, which he quickly deposited into his packsack.

That evening over dinner I browsed my *Lonely Planet: Nepal* looking at the map of Thamel. Curious about what would be included in the *Facts for the visitor* section, I discovered the following:

Other Scams include young kids asking for milk; you buy the milk at a designated store at an inflated price, the kid then returns the milk and pockets some of the mark-up (you can prevent this by opening the milk). (6th Edition 2003: 68)

Bikkie's occupation was not the simple shoe-shine boy after all; he knew how to scrounge tourists. Did I feel angry by being duped in this way? This seemed to be his true profession – and I had to admit that he did a very good job of it. The next morning, Bikkie was again waiting for me at the gate of the Kathmandu Guest House. Eventually I asked him what he had done with the milk. He told me he brought it home for his sister. He said that he'd like me to come to his house. When I asked why, he said because he wants to show me his house. "Will I meet your mother?" I asked. Yes he replied - and his sisters. I told him that it would mean my meeting him even earlier in the morning and we arranged a time. Even though I came with my own agenda, the incident gave me some insight into how the shopkeepers, beggars, and professional scammers in

Kathmandu viewed me. I was after all, an object in their world. I never did meet him again as I changed hotels that evening.

The last day of the workshop ended early, and I was determined to meet the director of USC Nepal, Sharam who had not been available all week. The driver picked us up and Ramesh and I headed back to the USC office together. The USC office is located in the diplomatic area of Kathmandu, away from the chaotic hubbub of the city. The building is an elegant but simple chifon yellow stucco building surrounded by a neat lawn with flowers around the outer edges. On the second floor, the servant is removing the food tray from his office and bringing in some milk tea. Ravi is there and he has arranged to work on the same workshop exercises with Sharam. I was invited to join them. We went to the meeting room upstairs and Ravi presented the participatory research methodology exercise to Sharam analyzing USC programs in the Dalchowki region. The focus was on the issue of enhancing seed exchange activities, and the exercise entailed analyzing as many stakeholders as possible: farmers, self-help groups, co-operatives, seed entrepreneurs association, Village District Chiefs (VDCs), the gene bank (NARC), and seed dealers. Each of these stakeholders was considered in terms of three aspects: Power, Interest, and Legitimacy. Power encompasses both resources (money, land) and knowledge. Interest entails how much one has to gain or lose by the activity. Legitimacy refers to the recognition of one's knowledge by the other stakeholders. There was much discussion around defining the position of the various stakeholders and assessing their various degrees of power. In particular, the notion that farmers can possibly be viewed as holding even a modicum of power, that farmers'

knowledge could be considered as “power” was a difficult concept for Sharam. Ravi and I both explain the power of having knowledge, the value it holds for their food security and ultimate survival, particularly in the context of “seed exchange” activity, going over this point several times.

At the end of the day, I browsed the documents locked behind glass, which turned out to be a collection of reports to funders dating back to the beginning of USC history and a few locally-published government texts on resource use in Nepal. Excerpts from the *Field Visit Report on Rasuwa (RCEP’s Proposed new program areas – September 2001)*, were particularly interesting. The section entitled *Why Traditional Knowledge Protection?* read:

In countries with significant cultural diversity, where the biodiversity is also relatively high, the role of traditional communities in protecting and maintaining the biological diversity is quite important. Therefore, the protection of traditional societies and the knowledge they possess demands high attention. The people have their own traditional skills and these skills need to be enhanced by motivating and encouraging them to be engaged in these professions for their income generation through different trainings – a potential for economic upliftment.... enhancing their working capability and confidence through trainings and providing practical knowledge in agriculture sectors, fertilizer making, seed conservation and its multiplication techniques.

Ravi and I are staying in the same hotel now and over dinner that night he continued his analysis, this time focusing on Nepal: “The trouble with Nepal is that they don’t recognize their ethnic groups. In India there are 700 ethnic groups, classified primitive, tribal groups. They are so advanced socially, culturally, and technologically in their knowledge of soil and techniques. Much of their knowledge is the solution to our problems.” He proceeds to describe how the Baiga tribe in Central India harvest bark

from a special tree: “They pick up a stone, throw it up in the air while holding their breath, then pick the bark.” In this manner, they never pick too much from a tree. “The problem with Nepal is that they don’t appreciate their Indigenous Knowledge. They consider it superstitious, backward.” Ravi explained that the Katkari tribe in Maharashtra are landless, bonded labourers who continue to live as hunter-gatherers. To illustrate their native wisdom, he describes how Katkari women draw out crabs from their holes during summer months by rubbing two stones to imitate the sound of cloudbursts. The Academy of Development Sciences has done a study to understand the hunting-gathering skills and their tremendous knowledge about uncultivated foods like fish, crabs, animals, birds, tubers/rhizomes, wild vegetables, fruits, and nuts. In India, scheduled castes and Dalits have been given privileges in education and jobs. “The trouble with Nepal....” This was to be a common refrain in my interviews with Ravi.

I am eager to go to Dunche to connect up with Anunta and Nanda. However, no one expects me to take the trip on my own. The question has been bandied about: Who should accompany me on the local bus to Dunche? The Director of USC mentioned a couple times that he needs to make the trip up there. But it is for some reason problematic. Eventually, he assigns one of the USC staff to accompany me to Rasuwa. The trip requires a full day and she had young children. Further, I learn that the next day will be the one day each week when she will have water at her house for washing. Even after it had been all arranged, because it would cause a great inconvenience to this young woman, I decided to cancel the plans. After having been in

Kathmandu for a full week, Anita suggested that we should go to Pokhara, a popular tourist town for the weekend.

b. Into the Middle Hills, Rasuwa – April 29, 2004

Even though the distance from Kathmandu to Dunche in the Rasuwa district of Nepal is only 175 kilometers, the ride on the local bus takes about nine hours. It was packed – the aisles crowded, women sitting on bags of rice, nursing babies – though not as unpleasant as I would have thought. There was a lightness about it, due perhaps to the high-pitched chime of the music (which seemed to me a cross between Chinese and Indian sounds) playing loudly as people jostled about. That, or the fatalistic attitude that one quickly adopts on such a trip. As the bus makes the myriad hair-pin turns up the mountainous road, we know that should it slide back even three feet due to any loose boulders, we would simply tumble over the edge. The length of time was exacerbated by the constant stop-and-go of the bus as people embarked and disembarked at all the villages along the way. We'd stop again just a few metres outside the village to pick up those without tickets who rode on top, hung onto the sides and the back of the bus. Then there were the military inspection stops (seven in total during this trip) in which all passengers must disembark – except for any foreigners – to present their identification and to inspect the bus for any explosive materials that may be making their way into the rural areas for the insurgent Maoists. There was myself and a gentleman, a missionary from the US, going to work with the Dalit (the untouchable caste) in Dunche.

At the final stop in Dunche, it was my turn: I had to report to the Forestry Office and to present my trekking permit granting me permission to be in the Langtang National Park. Finally off the long busride and a little dazed, I walked into the Forestry office and up to the desk where an official is sitting. In my peripheral vision, I notice a few other men sitting in the chairs that line the walls. I began to pull things out of my bag so that I could get to my notebook where the letter was. The book I was reading, my headscarf, a bottle of water, my Nepali phrasebook.... Suddenly I am surrounded by three or four men, their hands reaching and grabbing at the things I've placed on the table while I hand the letter over to the man behind the desk. I quickly put back into my bag what I could. He scrutinized the letter and then handed it back to me. The farmer who had been sitting next to me on the bus and was looking out for me, had waited outside and kindly accompanied me to the USC office. Only later did I realize that my headscarf and my Nepali phrasebook were missing.

The two USC fieldworkers I had planned to meet up with, Anunta and Nanda, had already set out for one of the villages further into the mountains beyond Dunche, but noone knew which village. They could not have had news of my delay as electricity and communications in Dunche is very sporadic at best. I was to spend several days in Dunche with two of the male fieldstaff, Murari and Karuna, the cook, Aley, and Hira, the office boy whose duties entailed running errands. My apartment, more like a bedroom with a small wooden table and a chair, was located just below the USC office on the first floor of the two-storey building. The other fieldstaff had rooms on the second floor near the office. There were two more apartments just across from mine, and an

adjacent hallway leading to the squat-toilet and a separate shower. Everything in the hallway was in concrete and there were grills on the window in the shower area. Rather than a door at the entrance to the building, was an accordion grill which was always left open. Just outside was a water pump where children would gather for a drink of well-water during the day. The building was surrounded by a low stone wall and iron gate. The view from our front lawn was a mountainous landscape of high peaks, cut through by green valleys, turbulent rivers, and thinning forests.

Murari had nothing to say about my missing Nepali phrase book and scarf, and I supposed that this loss was too minor even to mention. However, I would have liked to have some basic phrases to greet people and to shop. Since it was the end of the month, they were preoccupied with financial reporting to their Canadian and other donors. Fortunately, somebody I met along the way had given me the names of several Peace Corps volunteers living and working in Dunche. So, the next day I headed out into the village asking for Tulley, Abe, and Wren. Tulley who was from Oregon, had spent two years in Dunche teaching science at the local school and knew a lot about the village. More importantly, she speaks Nepali and agreed to introduce me to a few of the local women and to act as an interpreter.

Every morning for the next week Tulley, Wren, and I set out for a walk along the Trisuli river in the direction of Gasakiund, considered a sacred lake for Buddhists and Hindus alike. The trail to Gasakiund is also known as a favourite mini-trek of four days for tourists. Tulley had taken on the job of collecting daily water samples from the river

for a local organization to verify whether it was safe for drinking. There was plumbing in each home in Dunche, though the water was not treated. Along the way, we see several water mills set up just over the rushing water. These are used to mill the barley and wheat into flour. We would usually cross paths with young women coming out of the forest bent over with loads of firewood, good sized branches, on their backs.

Women's work in the village consists of household chores, farming, and collecting fodder and firewood which has become very problematic lately. Sanu talked about that problem:

Fodder and firewood used to be got easily before.... Maybe there are too many people now, but the forest is becoming finished, gone completely. There was a forest guard before and they had set regulations about where we could go. But since the Maoists burned the forest station they are afraid to, so today there are no restrictions. Some people have begun to plant their own fodder trees, *utish*³ seedlings, and they can get fodder and firewood from these.

The lack of fuelwood energy for residential use is considered **the** main reason for severe and continuous deforestation by an ever increasing population. These agricultural residues are being burnt for cooking and heating fuel, rather than brought back into the ecological system to increase soil fertility. This makes villages want to rely more and more on inorganic chemical fertilizers and pesticides.

At the end of the week Hira agrees to travel with me to Gutlang, a Tamang village located in the high hills region further north, to meet up with Anunta and Nanda. Gutlang is one of the villages inhabited by Nepal's Tibetan-like peoples, now generically referred to as *Janajati*,⁴ who inhabit the high reaches of the Himalayas along

³ *Utish* – an alder tree used for firewood and to stabilize soil and prevent landslides (*alnus nepalensis*)

⁴ ethnic groups

the borders with Tibet. Ethnic groups in Nepal number over sixty and represent a population of around 40 percent of the country. All these groups have been indigenous to specific geographical “homelands” in various regions and are mostly land-owning farmers. However, due to the pervasiveness of the Hindu caste system and high caste monopoly of political power, these tribal groups have been drawn into the caste hierarchy over the centuries and given a status just above that of the *Dalits*, the untouchables.

c. A Tamang Village in the High Hills – May 6, 2004

The trip to Gutlang consists of a two-hour busride to Safrubensi, followed by a two- to three-hour walk. Hira, in his early 20s, had gone to school in Kathmandu and spoke English quite well. As we approach the village, we meet a young girl and a boy carrying bags of rice on their backs, the weight held there by the cloth bands stretched across their foreheads. They speak a Tibetan dialect called Tamang which Hira does not understand. Fortunately they also speak and understand Nepali.

The view of the village nestled in the deep valley is magnificent. (*Figures 4 & 5*) Arriving in the region of Gutlang (situated in the valley at an altitude of 4300 feet and beyond), I am awed by the built landscape of tiny fields carved out of the mountainside and layered in meticulous terraces, one above the other, the crops coming up thick and strong, forming patterns of sown seeds. In an environment lacking large areas of cultivable land, the community must utilize a number of scattered plots in order to extract the maximum yield – from a basically unpromising land. The low valleys, cut



Figure 4: View of Gutlang, Rasuwa

deeply into the tangle of hills, create niches sheltered from extremes of climate where crops such as rice and millet can be grown in limited quantities. Barley, wheat, maize, millet and potatoes provide the most common staple foods. In addition, most villages have some common land used for grazing as well as access to forests for firewood and animal fodder. One can only imagine with awe how this pattern based on a co-evolution between human beings and the land emerged through their continuous skilful and intimate interaction with their environment.

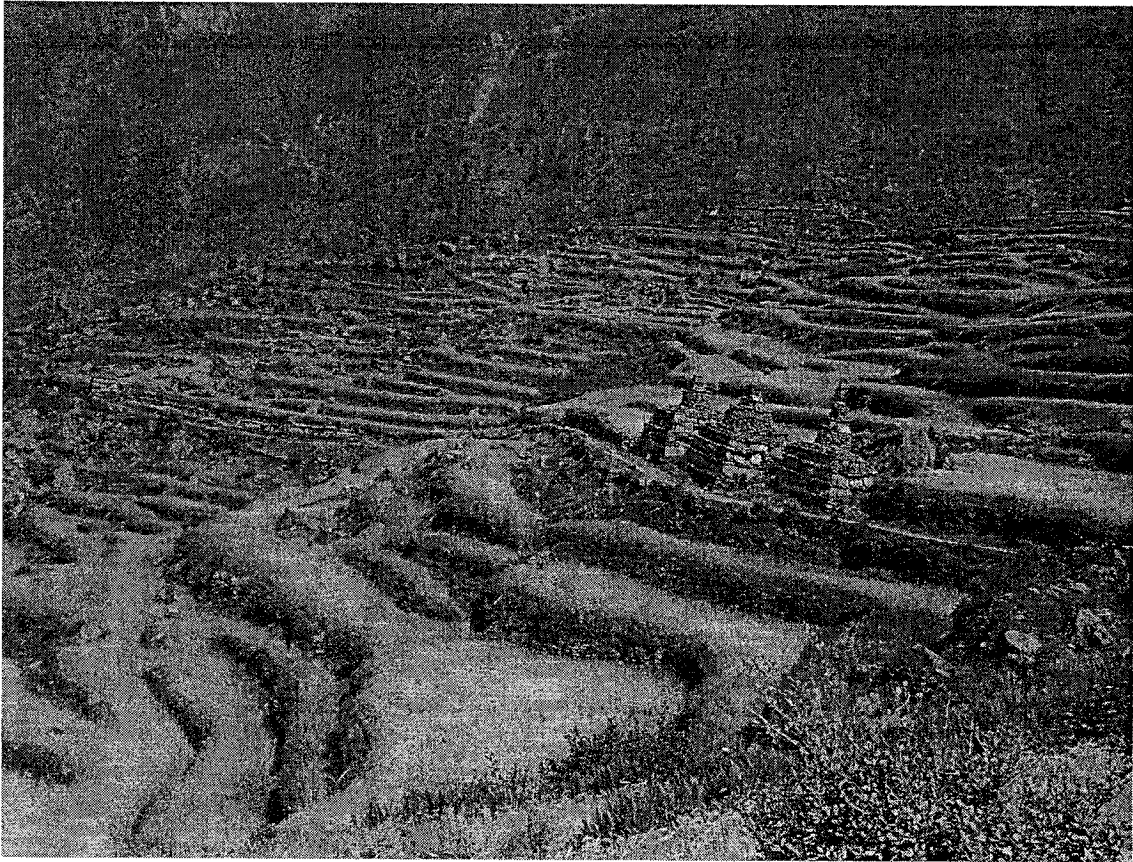


Figure 5: Terraced agriculture with stupas

After being on the road and walking mainly upwards for two hours, it was great to change direction and descend the steep sloping mountainside, gingerly down the small stones arranged in tiny narrow steps. In the midst of this built landscape we find *stupas*, stone structures, ubiquitous symbols of Tibetan Buddhism that hold the ashes of Tamang ancestors. We finally arrive at the home of Pemba Chiring, a schoolmaster and son of one of the wealthiest families in the village. His household consists of his parents, his two sisters, the husband of one sister, and their baby boy.

All the houses in Gutlang are constructed of a framework of wooden posts jointed together, having walls built of stone in which the crevices may be filled with

mortar made of clay and yak dung. Entrances to houses are on raised porches, as the animals are kept below in the front square of yard. Amidst all this stone and earth, the beautiful ornately carved lintels on the windows and doors stand out like works of art.

(Figure 6) This household had an outhouse installed a year ago, the only one in the village. The Tamang home has a common room, the main living area, and several smaller rooms to the side and back. At the centre and up against one wall in the common room is the stove made of an elevated clay structure (about one foot high) and topped with an iron frame with large and small cut-out rounds meant for the pots to sit in.

(Figure 7) We sit cross-legged on the floor around the stove. The first thing that Pemba says is “I am a Lama; that is because I eat Lamb,” and laughs. He is being humorous.

But I do not understand the significance of this pun until much later.



Figure 6: Children in front of homes in Gutlang

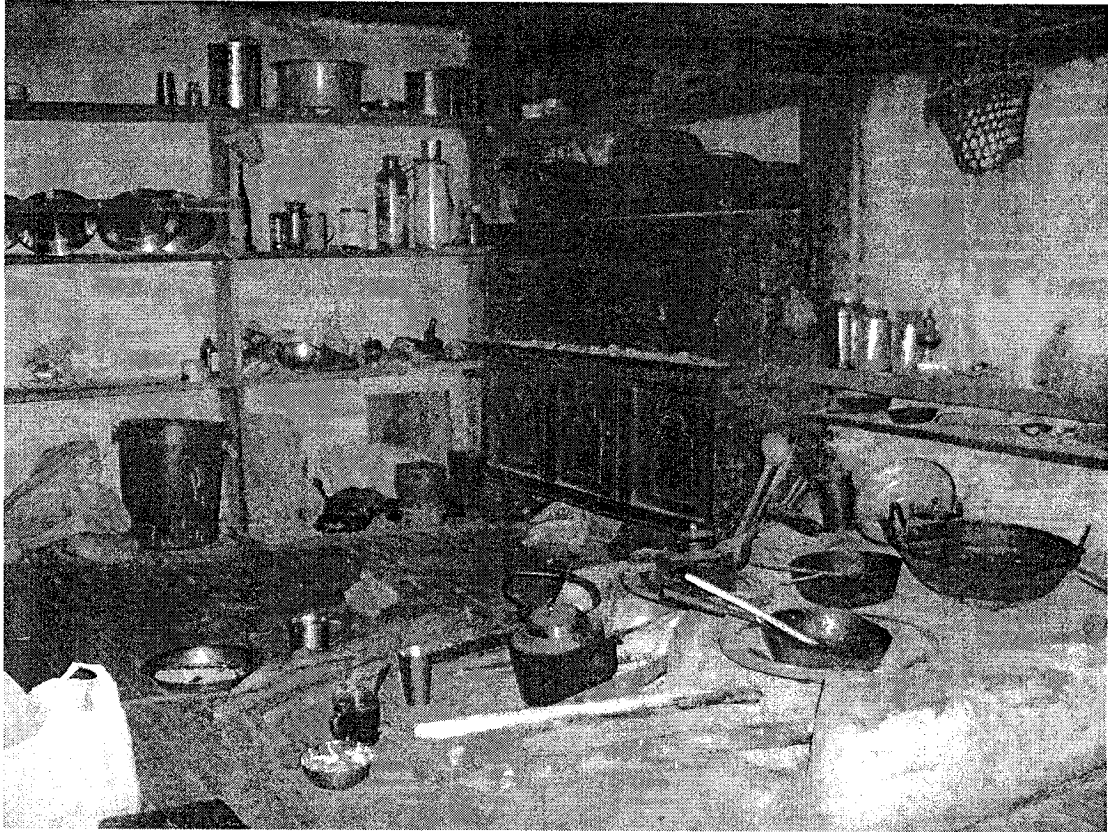


Figure 7: Common central room in Gutlang home

One of his sisters, Sormeela sits to one side of the stove and begins preparing the evening meal. She puts rice in a pressure cooker on the stove, and several thick tree branches are slid in under the iron frame to feed the flames. These stoves are quite an improvement over the open fires that most villagers use to cook with in their homes. She prepares the potatoes, holding them in the palm of her hand, cutting slices cross-wise but not all the way through, then turning them half-way, slicing again, and pulling the julienned pieces gracefully apart into the plate. The other sister, Timen, comes in with an armful of greens (*rayoko saag*), sits between Hira and me and begins twisting off chunks. She then peels some garlic and crushes it with a large wooden pestle and bowl. Oil is poured into a pan, the garlic is put in, then the potatoes and greens. They're covered and placed on the stove to cook. In another pot, Pemba's mother puts in water,

chunks of salt, some ground barley flour, and a small amount of dahl (lentils). About a half an hour later, they dish it out to everyone in the usual way. I am amazed at the huge quantities of rice they consume. The greens are served on the side, everyone is given a bowl of dahl in a clear broth. They pour the dahl broth onto the rice and begin mashing it together in a kneading way with their fingers, then pop a chunk into their mouths with their fingers. I was given a spoon, and notice that the two girls also use a spoon to eat. Everyone else uses their hands and at the end of the meal, lick their hands. Pemba's mother bends her head, lifts her plate, licking it all around the edges, and finally with a determined leap of her tongue, across the entire plate, wiping it all clean. This meal called, *Dhal Bhat* is a common and classic Nepali recipe and forms the staple daily diet of the majority of the population. People talk excitedly and ignore us for the most part, as we spoke about the USC school, village life, and farming.

The following day I have a chance to speak to Pemba's grandfather with Pemba acting as interpreter:

We can only grow maize and millet. The yield is enough to feed us for three to four months only. The rest of the year we have to buy rice. Our only source of income is selling potatoes and beans, milk, ghee, and other milk products.

The rice eaten in Gutlang is brought in from Kathmandu as is salt, oil and sugar. They sell potatoes and beans as a cash crop as well as ghee, considered a luxury food, in Kathmandu. They also sell handicrafts in the larger towns nearby. Pemba's sisters make the traditional hats having a thick layer of cloth at the front. I had seen women wear these to support the large bundles of wood they carried on their backs. They also rely on

uncultivated foods. Pemba had a dictionary of Nepali botany and he identified a few familiar varieties from the list: Bokhara plum, mulberry, mushrooms, wild yam, berry.

The majority of people in Nepal, around 88% of the population, depend for their livelihood on work in agriculture. A workshop report, *USC Canada Nepal's Workshops on Food Security Promotion (1997)*, discusses many issues surrounding food security in Nepal. The country has gone from being a food exporting country in the early 1980s, to being a food importing country “due to population explosion and almost negligible increase in food productivity...”(Pradhanang 1997). In the same Workshop report, Gyan Shrestha writes that communities living in the high mountainous region of Nepal, covering more than 20 districts including Rasuwa, are considered “food deficit”. This means that the government must supply food from the lower Terai plains area to the high mountains, either by helicopter or as I witnessed, on the local buses, and carried on their backs or by goat to the villages. Mr. Srestha states:

We Nepali people, unfortunately, think that rice is the sole prestigious food. So, we feel that everybody must get enough rice. If they cannot grow rice, they must receive it even from highly developed countries paying ten times more cost of transportation than rice cost itself. And, we feel great. This is totally wrong approach. (Shrestha 1997, Annex – I, p. 8)

This Workshop document also points out that the high cost of subsidizing food transported to Humla, a very poor area in the western part of the country, contributes to lack of motivation for those communities to grow alternative crops and to practice techniques that could increase yield, such as inter-cropping. Crops grown traditionally in the mountainous regions are millet, barley, and maize. However, millet is becoming less

popular due to its low status as a food. Sanumaya, a Tamang living in the Kavre district explained:

Before, they sowed only maize and barley [and millet]...It's good for the diet [but] without family manpower it is difficult to plant...[And] these days, kids say millet porridge is chicken manure... Not many sow [barley] either... Most eat maize gruel and rice... All good things have been given up... [Kids] are attracted by shops, by rice, craving *chow chow*⁵... [Vegetables?] Only radishes and *rayoko saag* were planted in the old days. Now garlic, onion, coriander, cauliflower, spinach, garlic, onion – all grow here if planted. (Panos Institute 2003: 4)

In regions of high altitude where only one or two crops can be grown, the production of grain definitely cannot meet the requirements of the population. This deficit had to be made up by trade. Barter of grain for salt with Tibet was historically one of the main pillars of economic life for the mid- and high-hills communities. Their livelihoods depended both on imports of rice from the mid-hill regions of Nepal, and exports of some of that rice and home-grown barley to Tibet in exchange for salt and other commodities – which was bartered for more rice from the mid-hills regions. The salt and grain-trade on which they depended also required sizeable flocks of sheep and goats to negotiate the caravan routes across the Himalayas to the middle-ranges. These were sold to Hindu populations in the mid-hills regions. Also, inclusion of livestock provided the manure that enriched the soil. Writing in 1975, John Murray reports that “they themselves are uncertain whether they can subsist on home-grown grain if this trade ceased” (Murray 1975: 246).

⁵ packet of instant noodles

d. Learning about Tamang culture – May 8, 2004

My guides, Hira and Rajesh take me to the place where the village Lama lives and village gatherings take place. It is a circular cliff jutting out, overlooking the terraces of fields – definitely the best view of the land. At the center, the village Lama has constructed a small raised platform enclosed on three sides by woven mats tied to four freshly cut saplings lodged in the earth. This raised altar houses the *Tormo*, a statue-like figure about a foot in height meant to represent the Mother, which is made out of a dough of ghee, flour, and sugar. There are also iconographic paintings (*thangku*), offerings, and ritual implements. At the top is placed a *Passam*, a branch from a juniper⁶ tree. Just as we arrive in the court, a man suddenly appears from a building nearby. He is wearing a red silk Chinese-like robe and his hair is cut very short, unlike most Nepali men. It is Hisi Chhiring, one of the village lamas. He immediately begins reading from his notebook which he has filled with Tibetan writing. Hira and Rajesh listen politely as he continues. When I ask them what he is reading, they explain that it is something from the Buddhist scriptures from long ago. But they do not understand what it is about. I have many questions beginning with how many lamas are there in Gatlang, how does one become a lama, and what is their role?

As it turns out, I have arrived on the Buddha's birthday, and five days of celebration will take place around this altar. The next day I wander along the narrow paths between the tight rows of flag-stone houses in the village and come upon two older men sitting on chairs outside. They are putting together several wooden poles and connecting these to the form of a horse's head. Having practiced Buddhism myself, I

⁶ juniper is an ingredient of the incense traditionally used in Buddhist rituals.

am eager to see this celebration of the Buddha's birthday hoping that there will be something familiar. This may be a small piece of common ground that I may share with this community. I am familiar with the Mahayana version of Buddhism and imagine that this version of Buddhist practice may be in the "little tradition" associated with divinities and spirits.

At some point in mid-afternoon, the villagers stream in from every direction, their homes, the hills to the north, the fields to the south, and assemble in the courtyard extending out and over the terraced fields. The players in this ritual dance are dressed in colourful costumes and hats. They have stepped into the constructed frames now covered in colourful cloth which are attached to them, and they carry spears. Several other men stand at points around the altar holding large narrow drums and beating out the rhythm as the men gallop around the altar in a celebratory manner. The villagers continue to stream in - men and women, women and children, young adults - and take their places along the edges of the circular space. Everyone is excited and the atmosphere is one of joy. (*Figure 8*)

I notice that the older women arrive carrying a large plate stacked with layers of white cloth in one hand and bottles of homemade alcohol, known as *chang*, topped with ghee in the other. Every once in a while, the dancing stops and a skirmish is enacted as spears clash together above the dancers' heads. The women go up to the men on horseback, and stretching their arms up, they place one of the small white cloths around the neck of the horsemen. Then they give them a drink of alcohol from their bottle. The dancing continues around and around in this same manner as people watch joyfully – for

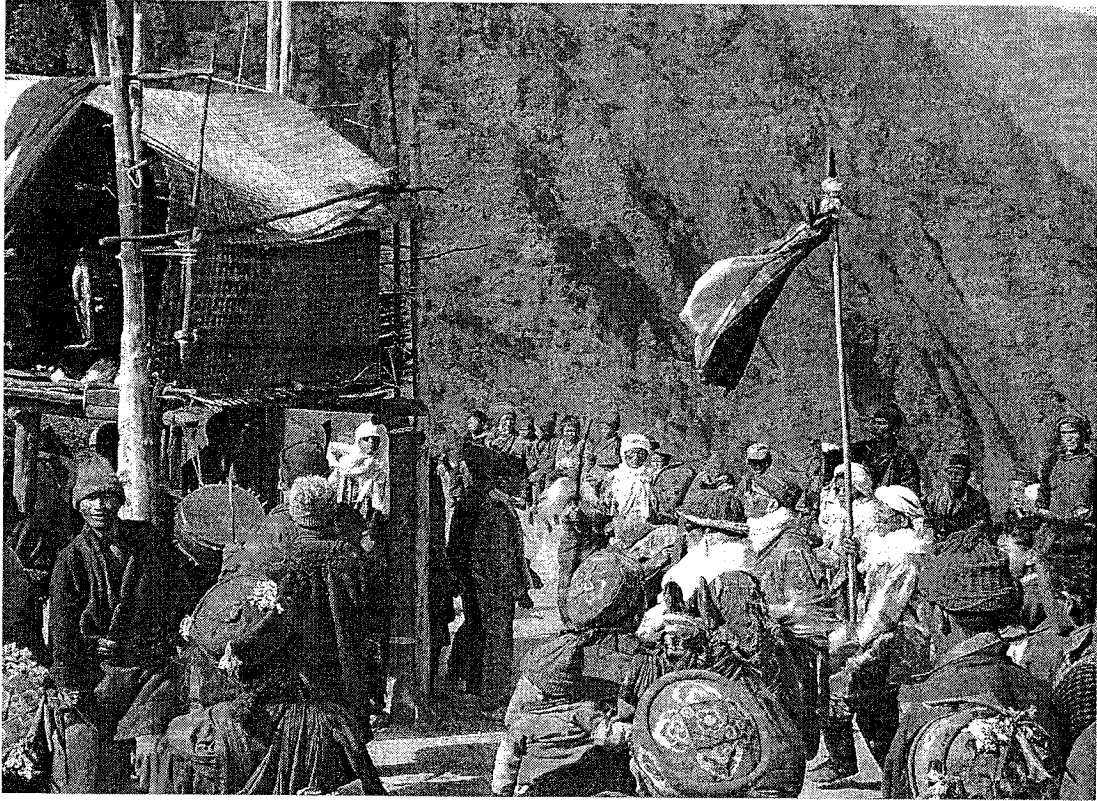


Figure 8: The Horse Dance

several hours. The drumbeat has taken on a quicker rhythm and the villagers appear more excited. Finally, everything stops and all the people turn and look north towards the high hills. There are many men coming from different directions in the distance. They do not appear to be dressed for this festival. They take the winding paths down the steep mountain and eventually come together into one line descending the stone steps leading into the village. People begin to laugh at them. It takes me a while to figure out why. They are wearing white shirts and plain trousers. Some wear brimmed hats or toques and big black glasses, even moustaches and ties. It is a farce! They represent Nepali government bureaucrats. They come into the courtyard in front of the raised altar and begin shaking hands with the soldiers. At the end of the day I am totally confused. A

horse-dance for Buddha's birthday? Rajesh explained simply that this was a re-enactment of a battle between China and Nepal. In none of my reading about Tamang lamaic rituals was there anything about a horse-dance or enactment of a battle? What is the significance, I wonder? Why would this be a central aspect of a ceremony for these Tamang people living in this isolated community?

The centrality of 'The Horse Dance' on Buddha's birthday remained a mystery to me until I delved into the history of the Tamang. A local myth maintains that during the war between Nepal and Tibet (in 1855-56), some Tamang acted as interpreters for the Gorkha army, and later they were also helpful in the peace negotiations (Murray 1975: 267). I never enquired with Pemba as to what land tenure rights exist in Gutlang or the tax system with the state of Nepal. This land could have been given to them by the Monarch in recognition of their inalienable, ancestral land rights, as occurred in some rare cases. However, I cannot help but wonder whether this Tamang community residing near the northern borders with Tibet may have been granted their estates by the Ranas for assistance in skirmishes with Tibet.

The next day Hira and Rajesh decide to show me Parvati Kunda, the village *gombo*, a small temple that houses clay images of the Buddha, located further north into the mountains. As the village is situated in a mountainous valley, shepherds must take their herds further up for grazing into the areas that are not part of the system of terraces. We meet Pemba's father with a herd of sheep. I am amazed at the heartiness of these people, as even the eldest make their way up the steep sides (at an elevation of

4,500 feet and beyond) to tend to their animals. Chiring explains that he needs to take his goats



Figure 9: Goats grazing in the High Hills

further up in the spring because there is almost nothing for them to graze on. (*Figure 9*)

In Tibetan, *gompo* means monastery or hermitage and Rajesh explains that it is a Buddhist site. Then why are there Hindu icons all around the top? And why a huge prayer wheel which I had seen in the Hindu temple I visited in the Patan Museum? (*See Figure 7*) The elsewhere distinct difference between the Hindu and Buddhist gods and icons does not appear very clear here.



Figure 7: Hira and Rajesh at Parvati Kunda

The Tamang have a fascinating past. Contemporary Tamang are usually thought to be a group of people who descended from Tibet centuries ago or to be an indigenous population of the central Himalayas. Those people now labeled “Tamang” constitute the largest Tibeto-Burman-speaking ethnic group in Nepal, numbering 522,416 speakers at the 1981 censuses (HMG 1984 quoted in Holmberg 1989: 17), though these figures are probably low. They reside to the north of Kathmandu on the southern slopes of the high range of the Himalayas sometimes to the borders of Tibet; west as far as the Buri-Gandaki River; east through the water shed of the Dudh River. Tamang make up approximately 83% percent of the total population in the Rasuwa district. However, the Tamang tendency to recognize a sense of affinity among themselves as one people with

a common origin, history, and set of clans, is a recent phenomenon (Holmberg 1989: 20).

The construction of the Tamang identity as a distinct group occurred through an intriguing dynamic between the orthodox Brahmanical ideology accompanying the formation of the state, and the social reality of the Tibeto-Berman speaking groups of the high hills regions of Nepal. The central Himalayas had been composed of disparate principalities, but these diverse groups and regions were brought into a centralized administration based in Kathmandu. In the late eighteenth century, Thakuri overlords from Gorkha, a town to the west of the Kathmandu Valley, consolidated what was to become the present state of Nepal. These Thakuri people were Hindu, high caste, and considered themselves Rajput warriors, ritually superseded only by Brahmans in the Hindu social ideology. The lands and labour of the Tamang were appropriated early on to support the feudal-like state.

There are three aspects of the Hindu perception of the “Murmi” (peoples now known as Tamang) that came into play in the historical formation of Tamang as a distinct group: 1) they were incorporated into the state as a subjugated population; 2) they were marked off from other ethnic groups in Nepal because they consumed beef; and 3) they were associated with lamas and Buddhism. Because of these attributes they remained “outside the fold of the nascent state order” (Holmberg 1989: 23). They were not ascribed as “untouchables” as were other subjugated non-Hindu populations who were incorporated into the caste-system. This was due to their distinctiveness as meat-

eaters, which served to keep the Tamang separate and outside the caste system and allowed them to keep their own religion.

Throughout the nineteenth century and continuing to today, Tamang are marked as meat eaters and meat eating is charged with a great deal of significance in the Hindu Kingdom of Nepal. In Nepal, as in India, respect for the cow is integral in the differentiation of social and religious groups. Not only are cows divine, but respect for cows and for Brahmans go together. To respect cows implies acceptance of Hindu hierarchy: to honour cows is to honour Brahmans and therefore implies acceptance of the culture of caste upon which the ritual authority of the state is based. As such, in Hindu social logic, “to accuse people of consuming beef is to accuse them of violating essential principals of order, including the political order” (Holmberg 1989: 29). This association of eating cows does not reflect contemporary Tamang practices as they do respect the sanctity of the cow and even perform standard Hindu rituals of devotion toward cows. Also, villagers who travel outside the village have dropped the practice of eating even dried beef carrion. Thus, in the contemporary context, this designation of Tamang as meat-eaters serves rather to reveal a political agenda. Accusations of violence to cows are voiced when factions vie for political domination on the local level. The historical exaggeration of beef eating both affirmed and enforced the separation of the Tamang as enemies of the nascent state. Contemporary Tamang, as we shall see, reformulate these attributions into their own version of group differentiation.

The legal codes of 1859 classified the Tamang as “pure” though they were among the lowest of the clean caste and were considered a subjugated population subject to enslavement. The Tamang emerged as an ethnic group – a Buddhist caste/tribe – within an encompassing Hindu sociopolity. The introduction of the term “Tamang” in the 1930s brought about the inclusion of the *Bhote*⁷ populations into greater Nepal and membership in the sociopolity giving them a place in the national identity. Hence they were included in the dominant Hindu state. However, their separateness as an ethnic group is what gave them the power of inclusion as a clean caste (Holmberg 1989: 26-30). In the Nepali state, the principal form of punishment would be for someone to lose their caste.

⁷ The term *Bhote* connotes “impure” and “unclean”. The first account of the Murmi by an outsider (1802-03) talks about Bhotiyas, people of Tibet. “The doctrine of the lamas is so obnoxious to the Ghorkalese, that..., they are called Siyena Bhotiyas, or Bhotiyas who eat carrion; for these people have such an appetite for beef, that they cannot abstain from the oxen who die a natural death, as they are not now permitted to murder the sacred animal....(Hamilton [1819] 1971: 52-53 quoted in Holmberg 1989: 23).

Their association with the Lamaic doctrine of Buddhism brought together the Tamang into a competing socio-religious order. This closer alliance to Tibetan forms than to Indo-Nepalese forms could read as potential resistance to the formative state and may well have inspired fear in the Rana. To summarize:

...during the Rana period, Tamang were relegated ideologically to a position outside the Brahmanical order. Their lack of recognition of the Brahman, implied in the marking of both Bhote and contemporary Tamang as beef eating and Buddhist, contributed to their ambiguous status. They were abhorrent because they were separate, but their separateness is what gave them the power of inclusion as a clean caste. Contemporary Tamang clearly view themselves as a distinct religious society, one based on the authority of lamas as opposed to Brahmins; to this day they prefer to call themselves "Lama" to outsiders. (Holmberg 1989: 30)

Tamang communities have lived as clan-based local societies and an "amonastic" Buddhism took form tied to a regime of restricted exchange. State formation created the ethnic group called "Tamang" and contributed to a process of cultural introversion in a local area, bounding and constraining ritual and social formations (Holmberg 1989: 9). Thus, the animistic version of Buddhist religion is frozen because of lack of exchange along with Tibet.

The state administration allowed the Tamang local autonomy, a social ideology that enforced endogamy, and their demographic separateness of Tamang communities encouraged a cultural insularity and much variability among communities at the local level. This effectively "tribalized" the local Tamang societies Yet a social compatibility existed between tribelike Tamang and the hierarchical Indo-Nepalese and their castes.

As such, the position of the Tamang peoples in relation to the Hindu state of Nepal has been and continues to be ambiguous. Contemporary Tamang clearly view themselves as a distinct religious society with their social system based on the authority of lamas as opposed to Brahmans. Hence, Pemba's pun in introducing himself - "I am a lama; because I eat lamb" - indicating that the Tamang identity is distinct due to their having once been meat-eaters and the affirmation of their identity as Buddhists. The Tamang see themselves as a service caste within the Hindi ideology, not within the occupational differentiation and specialization of each caste (e.g., blacksmith, tailors, leatherworkers).

A central component of Tamang life is the notion of exchange in which social and cosmic order unfolds in a contained flux of giving and receiving. Reciprocity creates bonds of obligation among individuals and social groups and constitutes the governing ethos of village life.

Not to exchange and share stifles well-being. To hoard, to leave out, to be tightfisted or closemouthed, to crave wealth, or to exploit without return for personal enrichment all are violation of the principle of exchange and are the traits of harmful agents who swarm the village groves and regional forests. (Holmberg 1989: 54)

Hindu ideology defines social relations by rules of exclusion that regulate Hindu interactions according to a hierarchy of pure and impure. In Hindu transactions, to give a gift to someone is to acknowledge the recipient's superiority; Brahmans, like divinities, are described as the receivers of gifts and the lower castes, as the presenters of gifts. For the Tamang, making givers inferior to receivers seems an inversion of the proper order of things. When Tamang act with deference to local Bahun, their attitude reflects power

and not ritual purity of the Brahman, because Tamang do not consider themselves as part of the Hindu system of asymmetrical exchange. Tamang custom requires hospitality; they treat visitors, beggars and travelers generously, in offerings of food and drink.

e. Cultural Tourism to preserve Tibetan-like culture – May 12, 2004

The village of Gutlang has been identified as a unique cultural destination and is slated to become active in a Homestay-based cultural tourism program.

Realizing the greater potentiality of Gatlang village that consists a beautiful wooden village of unique architecture, ancient life style and cultural manifestation of Tamang people and the naturally beautiful surrounding environment, DDC: TRPAP is going to promote this village as a unique cultural tourism destination. (*Rural Tourism Bimonthly Bulletin, No. 6, May-June 2003, Rasuwa: 4*)

Rajesh, who is training to become a guide for the cultural tourism program, had pointed out the site of the soon to be built Museum/Community lodge located near the school in Gutlang explaining “There will be a sophisticated interior reflecting the Tamang culture, with shower and camping ground. The whole village will produce tourism products, handicrafts, way of life, Suabru dance.”

The *Tourism for Rural Poverty Alleviation Programme* (TRPAP) is supported financially by the HMG, MoCTA, the United Nations Development Programme, and the Department for International Development of the UK specifically to address poverty in the Rasuwa area within the Langtang National Park. “The rural scene today is one of progressive deterioration: more people, less land, stagnating productivity, meagre services, worsening food insecurity, and mounting poverty.” The program is managed

by the villagers and combines the goals of community development and conservation of the traditional culture of Tamang peoples while addressing the alleviation of poverty. I was able to learn about the Homestay tourism program already operating in Briddim, another Tibetan village in the Rasuwa region. Ram, the Village Tourism Associate, happened to be occupying the apartment across the hall from me in Dunche.

In Briddim, the Homestay Program has already been established for visiting tourists and is considered very successful in its first couple of years. Nineteen out of 40 households in Briddim have agreed to participate in the Homestay program where villagers host visitors as paying guests in their home. The households together form a Homestay Tourism Management Committee which coordinates hospitality so that households take turns having guests on a rotating basis. The tourists live with the families, eat with them, learn about their religion, and make wilderness treks in the mountainous Langtang National Park. The homes have prepared a separate room with two simple beds for visitors as explained in the Rural Tourism Bulletin (No. 5, Feb-March 2003):

The beds, bedding materials and the whole room environment is simple and reflects the lifestyle of Tibetan people. You will be enjoying the local foods with the Tibetan families....Also solar heated clean bathrooms and photovoltaic power available in two houses...In Briddim you can experience the unique and real life style of ancient centuries, remembering fairy-tales and history of Tibetan-Buddhist people ... You can observe and interact the every activities of those Tibetan farmers and enjoy with their rituals. You can observe their farming system, fooding pattern and grazing pattern. You can buy local handicrafts that includes local Carpet, Gloves,

The program aims to “preserve culture in the midst of change” Ram, the TRPAP tourism associate explains. “We are telling people not to change the core of their

traditional way of life: the traditions, rituals, housing styles. For example, someone has a house with corrugated metal roof. I ask them to paint it brown like the other wooden houses. They don't have so much wood for thick planks today. Women must wear traditional dress. Men are wearing sweat pants, etc. We ask them to wear traditional style. They are allowed to change the cloth using local materials, but the appearance should stay the same. They may refine the product. By preserving their own culture, they will get the benefits. They will get money. The handicrafts they sell include Tibetan pattern belts, hats, *bonka* (apron worn in the back). The money from homestay is used to pay for *dhal bhat*, bedding, Tibetan tea, ghee, salt, bread, alcohol. They have developed the 10-day Chorten Trail, creating a large circuit so that the poor will benefit. Guided trips will be charged by the committee who will supply tents, sleeping bags, etc. New vegetables will become localized in a few years, such as cauliflower and clover grasses in front yard. It [the Homestay Tourism Program] is also favourable for their own life. They will have better things. If they are aware of their culture, they can make some changes, slightly modify, respecting the core things, the core image.”

The “core image” of the Tibetan-like communities is being revitalized and reinforced through training programs. The program provides “7-skill development training to refine villagers’ skills on tourism enterprises”. These skills include “Professional Trekking Guide Training, Tamang Mane Song and Cultural Training, and Thanka [iconographic] painting and Woolen Bag and Shal Knitting Training.” Participants are also trained in “the importance of fresh vegetable on tourism, the role of vegetable in enhancing rural livelihoods, major variety of vegetables used in tourism

industry, seasons for producing those variety, methods of production and nursery management including plastic tunnel house construction” After having the training, participants are expected “to start new businesses and explore new areas for starting tourism related enterprises” (*Rural Tourism Bulletin No. 5, February-March 2003*, page 3). Participating families have language training in English through Peace Corps volunteers. (The two Peace Corps volunteers, Abe and Wren participated in this English-language training)

The cultural part of the program includes a visit to Rasuwa-gadi, the place where the war between Nepal and China along the border of Tibet took place in 1855-56. The visits to the border also serve to re-enact the historical trade relations that took place between the tribal communities living in the high hills prior to the isolationist period of the Rana reign (1953-1971) . “The Tamang are frontier people,” Ram continues, and “they will make the traditional exchanges of butter, rice, chilies, apples, lemons and tomatoes - These fetch high prices - in exchange for china cups, radios, cassettes, blankets, solar systems.” This part of the cultural tourism program is focussed on reviving and re-enacting this aspect of Tamang culture.

The trade in Tibetan salt that occurred at the border was the mainstay of the mercantile activities of the border-people up until just a couple decades ago. Getting the salt along torturous caravan routes across the Himalayan main range to barter for this essential commodity brought many times its volume in grain. The occupation of Tibet by Chinese forces in 1959 disrupted the traditional trade relations throughout the regions

adjoining Northern Nepal (Murray 1975: 1). This left the high-hills peoples losing a way of life that involved a high degree of mobility and mercantile skills. They no longer had a commodity with which to barter for rice and other goods (Murray 1975: 5). As the zone of Indian commercial influence expanded (i.e., salt, rice and other commodities), the scope for their barter trades shrunk, so that they were no longer able to obtain the rice and other goods they require both for their own needs and for re-export to Tibet. Also, sheep and goats were valuable not only for the sake of their milk and meat, but their carrying capacity in high and rugged country once commanded high prices among the Tamang Hindu neighbours as pack-animals, for plowing, and their high milk yield. Decline in the salt-grain trade in the middle regions caused by these external factors threatens the prosperity of the entire region. Today the earnings from employment in the service of mountaineers and tourists attempts to replace the income derived from the trade with Tibet. Tourism is the main industry in the Himalayas and “recognized as an instrument for development” (Kunwar 2002: 11). I speculated that the increase in the public’s attraction to the unique characteristics of the “Tibetan-like” Tamang communities as emphasized in the tourism literature could be a destination of interest due to the common concern for the ongoing domination and destruction of the Tibetan culture by the Chinese.

e. An English Boarding School in Dunche – May 13, 2004

On my return to Dunche, I discover that this re-assembling of their tradition for the purposes of conserving Tamang culture in one place is causing a very distorted or divergent pattern of development in another. I hear that there are only three children

remaining in the local school in Briddim. The people living in Briddim ask the wealthy Swiss, German, and Japanese tourists to contribute money so that they can send their children to school. They elect to send them to English boarding schools, either in Dunche or in Kathmandu, rather than the local village school. In response to my question as to how this sending their children away might affect the goal of the TRPAP program, that is, to preserve the Tibetan-like culture, Ram explains: “When they marry, they will want to return to their village. They will need to know their own culture. She will live with the parents of her husband and learn about the culture. Rituals, handicrafts start after their maturity. Then they will pick-up their culture. Their ultimate destination is their home: To be married, to live in their own village. Their parents will certainly keep the tradition for them.”

His comment that “parents (are) keeping the tradition for them” while they are in the English-language boarding schools and his confidence that they will return home and reconnect with their traditional culture, was not convincing. I had met several young people (in their 20s) currently working in hotels in Pokhara and in Kathmandu. They have taken their tourism training in Singapore or in the United States even. They are modern in their thinking and wish ultimately to live in other parts of the world. There is a paradox in this strange outcome of a program designed to preserve the culture. I was to have first-hand experience of the boarding school in Dunche, a fair-sized town in the mid-hill region where I encountered the following scene:

It is early morning at “Highland Bording School” as the children file out from the dormitory to assemble in the concrete courtyard at the side of the school. The Principal and the Vice-Principal, Puja, stand at the front as the children dressed in their red uniforms - slacks or pleated skirts, red jackets, and ties - align themselves in 10 rows arranged by age (from 5 to 15). We hear “Good morning sir, Good morning Miss.” The Principal leads the morning exercise - arms stretched out in front, up, out to the sides, knee bends – while the teachers walk along the aisles checking to make sure the children’s hands are clean and their handkerchiefs tucked in out of sight. Puja walks through the rows of the younger children, tucking in their shirts, hankies, or helping them to interpret the instructions. Next, they stand straight with their arms at their sides and begin reciting together, a concerted murmur of something that I cannot understand, though I’m sure that it is not in Nepali. I am curious as to what is the content of this rote prayer. (*See Figure 11*)



Figure 11: Children in schoolyard of an English boarding school

At the end of the assembly, I approach the Principal and ask him what the children recited. He replies, "They chant to do well in school." "Yes, I understand. What is the chant saying?" I ask. "I will tell you" he replies. I wait, but no reply follows. "I'd really like to know what the children were reciting" I ask again. "I will tell you" he insists. He goes into the building. Eventually, I approach Puja in the office. I need to find out which class I am to take as a substitute teacher on my first morning. Now I see that the Principal has been discussing with the others in the office and Puja gives me the answer to my question. "It is the 'Our Father'. We used to say the national anthem, but that was cancelled." She explains that there had been a teacher from China many years ago. "He was Christian and had the children recite the Lord's Prayer. They've used it

ever since.” The children know it by rote and recite it each morning, though noone knows what it means.

As the children make their way to their classrooms, two men and a woman arrive in the schoolyard. I can see from their dress that they are herders, very poor. But they appear triumphant and happy as they discuss with the Principal, their children standing closeby. I learn later that they are from the high hills of the Langtang region and have walked a distance for several hours to bring their children to the “English Bording School”.

As I enter the classroom of the Grade V Computer class, the children rise in unison and recite together: “Good morning Miss.” I am both amused and impressed by this automatic and very polite greeting in English. There was no surprise to having a perfect stranger show up in their class that morning. I ask, “How are you?” “We are fine” they reply together. I imagine the rest of the day continuing to unfold in this automatic way. I ask the children what they are learning in this class. I am shown the text book on computers and the chapter called *Learning Typing Tutor*. The content is set out in a very structured way, so I begin by reviewing the chapter. “What is a keyboard?” Hands go up. I signal to one of many eager boys stretching up from their seats to answer. “An electronic inputting device for alphabetic, numerical and special keys.” Exactly as written in the text. These children know the answers though have never even seen a computer.

At the end of the day, I sit in Puja's office and she explains why people are choosing to send their children to the boarding school rather than the local school. The people in Nepal who do receive education are not interested in working. "That's why the teachers in the local primary school don't care what the students do. Those children don't learn." School statistics are actually impressive, but the average school is badly equipped – and there are other problems inherent in the state education: The curriculum is practically no use to the children; teachers do not understand the language of the ethnic group they are working with; much learning is by rote; there is high absenteeism; and high failure rates on exams (Macfarlane 1994: 116) All very good reasons to choose the English schools.

A well-groomed hotelier (unlike the herder I had seen earlier in the day) in western attire, slacks, shirt, wearing glasses (rarely seen) arrives at the office bringing gifts for his three children who join him for a visit in the office. He hands them pens, pencils, erasers, and a woolen tuque for his daughter. She plays with the gold ring on his finger, and his young son runs his fingers through his wavy hair. After he leaves, Puja explains that he is from Chunenbery and he has no sponsors (to pay for his children's education). "His two sisters married Americans and they send money for their education. He believes that education is the most important thing [for his children]."

Anunta and Nanda finally returned to Dunche and I am happy to meet them (*See figure 12*). A couple days later following the murder of Bhim Lal Hirachan, the District Chief for Rasuwa by Maoists, it was deemed not safe to make the three hour walks to

the nearby villages. So rather than accompanying them in their work, they tell me about their interactions with the local farmers, mainly women, in the Himalayan villages of Briddim, Hakku, and Thuman. I have a hard time imagining how expensive pesticides could make their way into the mountains – either by salespeople or by poor farmers on the local bus. I am interested in exactly what aspects of the farmers' knowledge they aim to reassert, to get some idea of their struggle to preserve their way of life.



Figure 12: Anunta and Nanda in Dunché

Anunta explains that farmers are interested in using pesticides because it is new, but she and Nanda are asking people to stop using them. They are helping the farmers to preserve their traditional knowledge, which she defines as what they have learned from their parents' generation and what is passed down. They help them to improve this knowledge by trying to get them to not change their farming practices, or adopt modern

technologies. They suggest to them ecological solutions. They are showing them how to make compost, and introducing new methods of pest control, such as tobacco and hot peppers that deter certain pests. (The same ecological farming practices used in Canada.) These farmers save and re-use their own seeds – except for cauliflower, carrots, and cabbage, which seeds come from outside. Most of their work with the women, however, is focused on the health and sanitation conditions of the women and their children. “This entails discussing personal hygiene” She advises them to keep water in the outhouses. She discusses birth control with the women and distributes the pill or injections which are good for six months. Women are hesitant to take birth control. They fear that reducing the number of children they have will make them appear weak. They also discuss birth control with the men. They talk about the importance of ventilation in homes, how to look after their children, what to feed them, and to wipe their eyes which become irritated from open cooking stoves. Mostly, they try to instil in the women the value of learning and staying in school, stressing this for young girls. There are many NGOs doing empowerment and capacity development work here.

I meet the two young boys from Gutlang, Sanjay Lama and Chhewan Dorje, on the front lawn of the USC office in Dunche. It is covered with clover that was seeded by airplane a number of years ago as one measure to reduce erosion of topsoil caused by deforestation. They are employed to collect and record the names of indigenous crops, plants and herbs in the forests and fields of Rasuwa. The drive to recognize indigenous knowledge and to protect indigenous communities as stated in the USC *Field Visit Report on Rasuwa* echoes the recommendations of the Earth Summit:

(C)ommunity-based traditional knowledge of biological resources have neither been adequately recognized nor the community's access to resources and rights over benefits have been adequately guaranteed. Fulfilling CBD obligations demand protection of local indigenous communities of the country and the knowledge associated with them with regard to conservation and sustainable utilization of the resources. (Field Visit Report on Rasuwa, RCEP's Proposed new program areas – September 2001: 4)

How do they go about collecting and recording this information? Chiring, the Lama I met in Gutlang, and the village shaman, are sources of knowledge about herbal plants as Chiring makes herbal medicines. For cultivated harvests, they ask the women. If they know the plant, they write the name down, both the local Tamang and the Nepali name. If they don't know the plant, they collect a sample in newspaper and the forestry office will look it up. The name of the plant is recorded along with its location; when it germinates; its use; how many years it has been used; the source of seed (local or market), medicinal or other properties; and processing. There is also information under the heading "involvement" which entails which caste, religion, or occupation is using the plant. And finally, the status of the plant describes whether it is decreasing in occurrence.

f. Analysis

In the above rendering of my fieldwork, I have relied on my ethnographic data and substantial secondary sources intended to substantiate my observations. In this analysis, I attempt to illustrate the responses to issues of resource conservation and food security being addressed through the indigenous knowledge movement. The first question, I ask is, what do the Tamang share with other indigenous peoples concerned with food security and resource degradation and how are they different? How are their

traditional values and practices being reinforced and/or reworked given the serious erosion of their environment and their way of life now taking place in the Himalayas? What new modes of economic organization and livelihood struggles as well as new cultural and knowledge repertoires are resulting? And finally, how does analyzing the relationship between global and local help us to better understand the management of agro-ecological resources and sustainable development?

Like indigenous communities worldwide, conflict and expropriation of resources characterize the historical encounter of the nascent state of Nepal with the Tamang people. However, in most other ways, the Tamang are unlike other indigenous groups in the *indigenous knowledge* movement. In terms of Niezen's definition of *Indigenism*, much of the "countervailing force of criticism and agitation" by indigenous peoples is caused by state centralization, resource extraction, and large-scale projects that threaten loss of traditional livelihoods and result in encroaching modernization. In Nepal, we find no state effort to enforce centralization of these isolated Himalayan communities; hence, they are not concerned with reclaiming lost territory from a developmentalist-integrationist state. Where indigenous peoples often struggle within their societies for the toleration of multiple cultures, religions, and social orders (Niezen 2003: 212), Nepal is essentially pluralistic, having incorporated a multitude of different peoples who have migrated and now comprise its ethnic groups. The Hindu caste system effectively made a place for each ethnic group within the state's unifying ideology, resulting in a "mutual accommodation of contrary cultures into structures uniquely Nepalese" (Bista 1982). Even though they have been marginalized as a result of their distinct identity, oppressed

regarding their position, not given the full rights of all citizens, there is actually no state system that is infringing on their rights to self-determination.

At the same time, the exclusive use of the Nepali language and the Sanskritic idiom of administrative discourse automatically bars large sectors of Tamang from active engagement. And of course, the low opinion many government officers hold of Tamang does not encourage intensive involvement. Further, as Stacey Pigg points out (1992), there is a stigma regarding all village communities in Nepal. Due to their lack of *bikras*, they are seen as underdeveloped or backward. And finally, the official ideology of Hindu groups constructed the Tibeto-Burman Tamang and their superior power has enforced that view, contributing to their cultural enclosure. What the Tamang do share with other communities that fall under the rubric *indigenous*, is their reliance on some form of subsistence economy, attachment to a distinct culture, and lasting connections to a way of life that has survived 'since the beginning of time'. The resources on which they depend to maintain that survival are now threatened.

The common factor in the economy of populations living in the Himalayan high hills is a relatively inhospitable environment which precludes sole reliance on farming (Murray 1975: 4). This essential feature compelled the inhabitants of the high hills regions to seek alternative means of subsistence through adventurousness as mountain guides, and their mercantile courage to risk the salt-grain trade needed to ensure their livelihood. To a greater or lesser degree, all Tibeto-Burman populations have depended on barter trade with Tibet, which provided one of the main pillars of economic life for

these peoples. Himalayan traders bartered Tibetan salt, home-grown barley and livestock in exchange for rice and other important commodities from the mid-hill regions in order to meet their needs for self-sufficiency. The inability to participate in mercantile activities today could be one of the main causes of poverty and lack of food security among the high-hill Nepali people. This can be seen through the discussion concerning a major commodity, a staple food of Nepal, that of rice. It provides a good example of the impact of globalizing trends including the more recent impact on countries subject to WTO regulations - even in regions as far remote as Nepal.

The political climate that ensued following China's closure of both sides of the border in 1959 and the consequent need to acquire rice from the lower Terai region (which in the meantime had become a status food), increasingly in competition with imported less expensive rice from India, left a significant gap in the economic subsistence pattern of these communities. In addition, as my Indian informant Ravi pointed out, subsidizing the hybrid rice and its transportation to these regions, serves to displace the indigenous grains, varieties that are rapidly disappearing and in some cases, snubbed.

..... the formerly rice-surplus middle hills have become grain deficit areas..... In 1970 most families had enough rice for themselves and practically no rice was brought outside the village. By 1990 only a quarter of the villagers had enough rice for their needs; rice had become a luxury rather than a necessity and a large amount was being bought from the south [Terai]. (Macfarlane 1994: 107)

This gap in the economy has resulted in many men leaving the region to find work in Kathmandu or other regions. The result is the lack of male labour required to

tend to the traditional livestock – which is also an important commodity and essential aspect in mercantile activity, and ultimately, provides natural manure to enrich the soil. Participants in the workshop held at Dhulikhel, Kavre in 2003 organized by USC Canada-Nepal and SANFEC (South Asia Network of Food, Ecology and Culture) expressed concern that dozens of local varieties of rice have already become extinct. They no longer farm the local variety of *Mana Bhog* preferring to grow the more expensive *basmati* rice instead. The low-priced *mansuli* and *basmati* hybrid varieties, supplied by Indian multi-nationals, are replacing the indigenous *Mana Bhog*. The impact of new WTO regulations has far-reaching impact on South Asian farmers as described by one participant:

In America total output of rice worth \$1.2 billion, while subsidies provided to these farmers is \$1.4 billion... Can we afford to give subsidies to our farmers in that extent? The answer will be certainly no! If that is true, why do we ask the farmers to increase productivity? (K.K. Shrestha *et al* 2003)

Analyses of the decline in production often point to factors such as population increase and soil erosion. Not only is top-soil being lost downstream into the Bay of Bengal, but local labour is lost as young men leave the region to become coolies on road projects in the Terai. Their traditional means of livelihood – in adventurous guiding and skilful exchange with both Tibet and the mid-hill neighbours had been eroded long ago.

The discourse of food security and resource conservation is globalized, yet solutions must be found at the local level. SANFEC has taken the lead in bringing together a range of social actors at the local, regional, and international levels to form an arena in which contests over resources, values, and representations are taking place. The

network constitutes a social and spatial location in which actors mobilise social relations and deploy discursive and cultural means to address several normative and ethnical domains and issues – including that of simply remaining in the game. They have been evolving and flexing their muscles and striving to provide a counter-balance to corporatist modes of control through a re-ordering of power relations. This is one arena in which global processes are generating a whole new range of socio-political responses, which are ‘re-localised’ within the local framework of knowledge and culture.

USC-Canada Nepal’s focus on biodiversity conservation and food security issues while resonating with the SANFEC group, is rooted more in the problems of diminishing livelihood and the need to make their rapidly degrading resources sustainable, than in the need to assert an indigenous identity and way of life in face of a developmentalist or integrationist state. The increasing globalization of the food system and threats to biodiversity have repercussions in regions as remote as rural Nepal. The local response is aimed at maintaining the traditional farming practices and varieties, in increasing the status of traditional farming communities, and encouraging them to value and maintain their traditional farming practices. The SANFEC network provides support, knowledge sharing among NGOs in the movement, and solidarity. NGOs also generate new knowledge and disseminate it in efforts to counter the abstract, non-local sources of knowledge that government and corporations bring to developing rural areas. They represent “a genuine source of social knowledge and a particular framing of that knowledge” (Clammer 2000: 53) Their mandate goes further in terms of empowering

the women to have more choices and to take care of their own health and that of their children.

Another local response to the need to conserve indigenous knowledge and practices is occurring in another arena – that of tourism. Here again, the values and representations of Himalayan communities deploy discursive and cultural means for the attainment of the goal of preserving this threatened way of life. The cultural tourism program is designed to preserve the indigenous knowledge and way of life of Tibetan-like peoples. While cultural tourism is, by definition, considered a force for cultural preservation, it can be seen as an encroaching form of modernity. Tourists are attracted to features resembling the vanishing lifestyle of past societies and their search can be seen as “nostalgia, closely related to authenticity, and dissatisfaction with modern life, especially in Europe and Japan” (Turner 1973). Macconnell sees tourism as a ritual paid to the progressive differentiation resulting from modernity. Modernity he explains –

greedily incorporates the ‘pre-modern’ and ‘museumizes’ it to be displayed for viewing by modern man so that the touristic attractions are a heterogenous mix ranging from modern phenomena.... The quest for authenticity is fundamental in other times and other places. (Kunwar 2002: 40)

Studies have shown that acculturation due to culture contact between developed western peoples and less developed native populations produces “a gradual weakening of traditional cultures through what is called ‘trivialisation’ – when aspects of the host culture become a degraded commercialized form of entertainment for tourists” (*ibid*,74). Thus, I was struck when I saw the horse-dance performed later for tourists: the costumes were more elaborate and the women approached the tourists with the white strips of

cloth which they placed around their necks, rather than on the necks of the warriors. I wondered whether the aim of the TRPAP program - to preserve the 'core image' - might be the beginning of the commodification of cultural traits of these Tibetan-like peoples. Commodification occurs when the colourful local costumes, rituals, folk arts, etc. come to be seen as tourist services or commodities once they are performed or produced for touristic consumption. The costumes were far more elaborate than what I had seen in the celebration of Buddha's birthday in Gutlang.

This does not necessarily mean that tourism will not work to revitalize the host's culture. Preserving or revitalising local Tamang ethnic identity through a process of reconstructed ethnicity may contribute to reducing the social prejudices of this ethnic group, and ultimately promote a better understanding and positive social change (Smith 1989: 74) by reinforcing the traditional features of the Tamang: their high degree of mobility and entrepreneurial skills in trade and their long-standing tradition as a tourist receiving peoples as well as farmers. Compared to the Hindu peoples who are exclusionary to outsiders, the Buddhists are noted for being open and accepting of others, based on an ethos of reciprocity within their Tamang culture.

Nelson Graburn has argued the positive effects of tourism in the arts and crafts of hosts. Based on his work with eastern Canadian Inuit, he points out that change in traditional art forms resulting from outside contact occurs in three phases: Initially there may be a disappearance of traditional artistic designs and craft forms; followed by degenerate, unsophisticated replacements through mass-production techniques; which is

often followed by the resurgence of skill and craftsmanship and distinctive styles incorporating the deeper cultural beliefs in the host society (Graburn 1989). Thus, the TRPAP program could present some trivialization and commodification; though, ultimately could bring some positive effects to the marginalized and low status of the Tamang in the eyes of Hindu Nepal. It is impossible to predict whether one day the Tibetan-like peoples' cultural activities and the traditional farming will become directed towards the concerns of authentication for visiting expatriates who want to maintain a connection with home.

The tourism program was designed using an “Appreciative Participatory Planning and Action” tool. This process of engaging the community with the participating UN staff (two native Nepalese), constitutes an interesting interface situation that would reveal what constitutes Tamang culture, as well as whose knowledge is prioritized in defining “the core image” of Tamang culture and the central components of Buddhist practice. The context of tourism provides a particularly dynamic arena in which it is possible to note any conflicts in determining the cultural values and in deciding how the Tamang culture will be represented to visiting tourists.

The process of development entails an incomprehensible amount of destruction or, at the least, the subordination of local knowledge and practices. In yet another arena, there is an even greater disruption of the traditional social order taking place. By sending their children to English boarding school, Tamang children now have access to modern education – an education probably better than the local schools which are poorly

supervised and exhibit dismal rates of completion. Through education, will 'outside' knowledge become increasingly privileged? On the other hand, can we expect that there will one day come a shift in status of the Tamang and possibly a realignment in power relations between this marginalized group and the caste-system which has placed them outside and separate from larger society? Will the Tamang rise above and use modern knowledge to reclaim the value of their traditions?

Caste was outlawed in 1957, yet caste differences in Nepal continue to take on specific meanings depending on whose perspective one adopts. I had the opportunity to explore this idea further. Having discovered Dor Bahadur Bista's well-known book entitled *Fatalism and Development* early on in the field, I presented his four Diagrams representing the different views of caste in the Kathmandu Valley to several people to see to what extent different views exist (see Appendix 2). Murari, himself a Brahmin, sees the "Classical Model of Hindu Caste Hierarchy" as being the accurate view. This view is the classical Hindu model with Nepali ethnic groups not included in the hierarchy. He re-drew the hierarchical diagram adding the various ethnic groups into the bottom rungs. Anunta who belongs to an ethnic group, chose the "Secular Hierarchy - Viewed by Majority and practised by all" as the accurate representation of the caste system in Nepal. This was supported by my experience in our daily meals. The cook, Aley, joined Anunta and me at the table when we ate our meals. However, when I ate with Murari, Aley would sit by the stove. I wondered how individuals go about defining and negotiating their status with each person they meet.

In his incisive analysis of Nepali culture, Bista aims to shed light on the lack of development in the country despite the fact that “Nepal has received more foreign aid per head than any of the country in the world” (Macfarlane 1994: 111). Bista elaborates several aspects intrinsic to Nepali society to account for what he sees as its inability to adapt to technological and cultural change. These aspects include the interacting principles of *fatalism* and the *caste system*. The associated belief in Karma - which posits that one’s circumstances have been determined by a supreme deity at birth - creates a sense of fatalism so that personal responsibility is displaced to the outside, typically to the supernatural. In this way, the role of one’s own personal actions is neglected so that no sense of obligation is instilled. Extending this attitude to the societal level creates a lack of a sense of internalized responsibility towards society at large, what Bista refers to as “amoral familism”.

In Bista’s analysis, the Hindu high-caste value system is dominated by the Brahman-Chhetri elite and their values. Today the elite are adopting the non-work ideals of the Brahman priests who believe that erudition and ritual are the only important things; they despise all physical work while expecting the charity of others. This identity has become secularized and is being reinforced through the notion of education. The purpose of acquiring higher education is not directed to practical matters. One is not expected to work in order to receive a paycheque at the end of the month. This supported numerous rumours I heard of government employees who simply hang around government offices doing nothing.

The saving grace in Bista's analysis is that the majority of the population are not hierarchical, unproductive elite. In fact, the country is rich in human talent. In Bista's view, the hard-working ethnic groups are Nepal's greatest hope. The village is viewed as "an efficiently productive and harmonious social group, hard-working and conscientious." Even though their culture is regarded as "primitive" and of no importance to most of the country, their strong work ethic and values represent a great and presently unappreciated resource. According to Bista, Nepal needs to draw upon the value systems of the traditional ethnic groups in order to provide an alternative to the dominant system.

Chapter IV - Conclusion

The aim of my fieldwork was to see how local forms of *indigenous knowledge* are being reworked in interaction with changing external conditions. I wanted to get a glimpse of how globalizing and localizing processes are creating struggles for identity, space and power among those institutions concerned with protecting *indigenous knowledge* and lifeways. My original intention going into the field was to focus on a traditional crop or farming practice considered *indigenous* to a territorially designated community. I also expected to spend a sustained period of time living with a bounded, contained, and fairly homogenous community. This would provide a manageable context in which to identify instances of local knowledge, and to classify the traditional and modern by witnessing the struggle around such contact. Perhaps I was guilty of the tendency to idealize *indigenous knowledge* as representing a people's symbiotic, harmonious relationship with their land, living in idyllic harmony with nature, and having intimate connection to their soils, as conveyed in a 'reified' view of indigenous knowledge.

As a result of unexpected circumstances, I was not able to spend an extended period of time in one location with one community. In fact, through random encounters, I discovered other arenas apart from farming in which the question of what is traditional or *indigenous knowledge* were central. Letting go of my metaphorical field meant opening up my analysis to a larger view of the multiple processes at play in the high hills region of Nepal. These exchanges served to bring about a perspective of the local that is unbounded, highly complex, and that calls for an examination of the influence of multiple

forces. Consequently, my search for manifestations of *indigenous knowledge* was redirected to “nodal points” in global and local relations. This resulted in a more multi-vocal and multi-dimensional view of Nepali society. The multiple arenas (the workshop, a tourism project, and a school, as well my NGO hosts) served to enlarge my cultural field site. My first challenge entailed unpacking some of the boundedness regarding ‘traditional culture’ that I brought with me.

But first, some deconstruction of the essentialized notion of *indigenous knowledge* was necessary. Within any local culture, whether in Nepal or in Ottawa¹, knowledge is subject to stratification and ideology (class, gender, status) and much of what is shared is actually imposed by patterns of power and authority. What is considered *indigenous knowledge* in small-scale peasant societies and packaged by the indigenous knowledge movement is generally technical aspects of applied knowledge. As a result, what often remains central to the *indigenous knowledge* movement is a concentration on identifying, documenting, and recording indigenous practices with a view to analysing, storing, and extracting it one day for use in resource management, or in some cases, to establish proprietary rights. Study and documentation of *indigenous knowledge* will somehow solve the problem. However, this approach can result in a simplifying and essentializing of local knowledge.

Yet indigenous knowledge is not a definable body of knowledge *independent* of the contexts in which it arises, and what indigenous peoples know cannot be

¹ All systems are culture-bound. Setting IK in opposition to western knowledge systems, generally within the tradition of science, places science as a reference point and thereby limits analysis of indigenous knowledge by narrowing the parameters of understanding through the imposition of western categories.

disembedded from its context. So that the range of skills and strategies that have evolved to guarantee survival of a community - whether selecting the heartiest cultivars, manoeuvring steep mountain passages, or choosing formal education - must include their imbeddedness in the context; that is, the circumstances of their social production, while recognizing their relational, contextual, and perspectival character. Thus, *indigenous knowledge* cannot be considered a convenient abstraction consisting of bite-sized chunks of information that can be fragmented, decontextualized, seen as a quick fix or panacea in development projects. In doing so, we ignore the specific, local experience in favour of a generalizable, abstract, universal – replicating the same problem that occurs when science is applied to development.

Indigenous knowledge may become reified in the hands of NGOs, which have become significant knowledge producing institutions within the universalizing discourse of the indigenous knowledge movement. They have become an influential moral and social force, defining the agenda of local groups, and highlighting the value of decisions appropriate to the community. Although their strategy often includes a view of the groundedness of a fixed community, in the defence of nature on which they depend for their subsistence, assumptions about the meaning of *indigenous knowledge* can misrepresent a culture through an essentialized view. Hastrup and Olwig refer to Appadurai's 'incarcerated natives', seen as tied ecologically and intellectually to places where their culture is regarded as closely adapted to their particular environment (Hastrup and Olwig 1997: 6). The notion of the close attachment of a people to their land and subsistence practice seems an extremely narrow perspective of the Tamang for example.

Himalayan traders, have always been engaged in mercantile affairs and adventure travels which are as much aspects of their culture as is their creating terraced landscapes for farming. As the social and historical background reveals, the disruption of this practice impacts as much on their livelihoods as does the erosion of the environment and disappearance of indigenous cultivars.

Indigenization of knowledge(s), while potentially powerfully creative for individuals and collectivities, run the risk of defining certain kinds of knowledge as absolutely local, without comparative scope or wider application (Moore 1996: 6). Moore draws attention to the danger of “radical othering”. The term *indigenous* forces us into a hegemonic oppositional logic of ‘us and them’, past and present, the dualism of modernity and tradition, and even the local and global. This asymmetry is part of the exoticizing nature of any discourse on the constructed other. It is important that anthropology recognize that local knowledge can be part of a set of knowledges relevant to political economy and the social sciences, comparative in scope as well as international in outlook.

The field of encounters (and the relationship of actors and institutions imbedded in these) that I encountered in Nepal clearly suggests that enclosed places do not exist in and of themselves. It was quite surprising to learn the extent to which India’s participation in free-trade is influencing the types of rice consumed in Nepal, causing the local cultivars to become extinct. Even the seemingly most remote and exotic people do not exist in isolation from the rest of the world as articulated by Hastrup and Olwig –

In a global space of relations, clearly defined places do not exist in and of themselves. Rather they [places] are constructed culturally, as communities of relations constitute and demarcate themselves within hierarchically organized spaces of unequal relationships (Hastrup and Olwig 1997: 7).

This loss of place as a dominant container for culture, allows us to look at mobility in the landscape and to focus on the processes of deterritorialization and reterritorialization. The low status and marginalization of the ethnic Tamang community in Nepal could be revived, even recreated through the cultural tourism program. The various ways in which people represent what they perceive as their culture may not be in agreement, and will often reflect contested ideas of local culture. To what extent is the cultural tourism program in Rasuwa defined primarily by the “locals” and does it serve their interests? It is people’s actions that alter the conditions of their existence – often in ways they never intend or foresee. Seeing peasant children in school uniforms learning about computers from books and without access to computers was one of the most astonishing features of my field experience.

By placing the actors at the centre of any analysis, the field comes to be a field of relationships - of significance to the people involved in the study. Putting the spotlight on relations rather than on locations, on cultural constructions, rather than cultural entities, becomes our object of study. We move beyond the smaller, interpersonal communities that anthropologists typically have studied in fieldwork (and that I had expected to work with) and explore the relations that are occurring – not only among individual actors, but

the relevant institutions. In addition, studying the historical context within which these relationships have been generated helps us to better understand their significance today.

If knowledge is to be accepted as a legitimate category and analytic device in anthropology, then given its connection to power, differentiality, and context within a culture, it is perhaps best to look for it as more than information – to find its manifestation not as “a fixed stock of applied knowledge from which techniques are drawn” – but rather as an aspect of culture involving subtle and not so subtle power relations. In her discussion of knowledge production, Moore posits the significance of borderlands and margins for gaining a glimpse of knowledge in transition, transformation, and reformulation (Moore 1996: 10). As she puts it, the focus is at the margins, in exile from the centre, in situations where actors’ knowledge comes into play. Post-modernism and post-structuralism embrace diversity and plurality, questioning boundedness and fixity. “We are now no longer looking for ontological categories, but for interwoven patterns; what was once systemic is now mobile” (Moore 1996: 9).

The question remains, how to gain insight into the struggles for identity, space and power caused by globalizing and localizing processes. One possible way is where it is ‘generated at the interface of cultural memory and individual intelligence,’ where it carries a moral and social load, and hints at the essence of the culture (Ellen 2002: 239). Arce and Long’s theory of ‘knowledge interfaces’ provides a framework of analysis that can help to reveal how knowledge and power are constituted and reconfigured. The focus here is on the discrepancies in values, interests, knowledge and power that typically occur

at points where different and conflicting social domains intersect, analysing how these are reinforced or reshaped by this process. For example, certain ideas about culture emanating from development agencies are “processed through a body of local knowledge” (ibid: 230). Ethnography would attempt to theorise these processes, aiming to reveal the socially-constructed and negotiated nature of knowledge and intervention processes. Thus, rather than focus analysis on the substantives themselves (gender, power, status), focusing on the localised power configurations revealed in interfaces points out the relational nature of their (gender, power, status) appropriation. The agents define goals and its context so that realities are defined in practice rather than by pre-established social structures.

As in Richard’s theory of performance, situated practice involves actors and brings a “set of improvisational capacities called forth by the needs of the moment” (Richards 1993). If *indigenous knowledge* is evident in dynamic, living systems, then it is found in the various social and cultural contexts in which knowledge is generated and put to use. Processes of social change in the high hills of Nepal have generated interfaces in which actors and institutions concerned with protecting *indigenous knowledge* and lifeways interact. Could these contexts be considered potential interfaces for identifying what is considered traditional or indigenous knowledge in the high hills region of Nepal?

Thus, I have attempted to suggest how these differentially empowered individuals and institutions are competing to produce locality within each of these arenas. I have relied to a great extent on secondary sources to give sufficient social and historical

context as to how globalizing and localizing processes have produced and may be continuing to produce shifts in economic organization and livelihood struggles that impact traditional ways, patterns of social organization, and even food choices. I have suggested possible ways in which ideas and practices of modernity are themselves appropriated and re-embedded in locally-situated practices, thus generating powerful countertendencies, exhibiting ‘distorted’ or ‘divergent’ patterns of development; and often re-assembling what is often naively designated as ‘tradition’. At the same time, it is evident that the impact of commodity markets, formal education, and professional specialization, as Scott (1998) has pointed out, may undermine the social conditions necessary for the continued elaboration of *metis*, or local knowledge.

This interface perspective has given me a greater sense of how analyzing the relationship between global and local can help us to better understand issues around the management of agro-ecological resources and sustainable development. Clearly, a more focussed analysis of each of these interfaces could reveal how cultural and knowledge repertoires are being contested, mobilized, and reshaped within these arena.

It is important to support and re-introduce (where necessary) the value of local indigenous knowledge in order to inform development in a more positive way. While we support the diversity of cultures, they are increasingly interpenetrated by and influencing one another. As Sillitoe points out, there is the danger of outsiders wanting to see the ‘other’ as different, and voyeuristically seeking exotic customs. At the same time, people may identify themselves as indigenous in order to establish their rights and to protect

their interests. They are eager to bolster their indigenous identity in a rapidly changing, globalizing world, seizing on, even reviving, indigenous knowledge to this end. “The balance between the local and the global means that we have communities wishing to embrace aspects of the global order while at the same time paradoxically defending their local identity....local people seeking their identity in the ethnographic present, emphasizing custom and indigenous knowledge” (Sillitoe 2002a: 133). The wish of people to globalize their local knowledge (through tourism for example) while simultaneously retaining their identity illustrates well the irony of *indigenous knowledge* informing development. There are paradoxes to resolve.

Roy Ellen claims that “there can be no retreat from *indigenous knowledge*. It must always be the point of departure and the final destination” (Ellen 2004: 256). What is important is that it is that the indigenous or local peoples themselves decide what constitutes *indigenous knowledge* and how that knowledge is used. The material and cultural objectives that local people wish to pursue is also a question for them to decide. Anthropologists have a role to play at the interface between knowledge, participation, and development (Schonhuth 2002: 154). Where *indigenous knowledge* is embedded in the fabric of the local community and agents localize aspects of modernity, the anthropologist can attempt to unmask the power differentials. S/he can show what happens when different knowledges meet by exploring the context and recording the differential aspect of knowledge (the different meanings and values distributed among different sectors of population) revealed in the interfaces. This kind of reflexivity provides greater awareness into how local forms of knowledge and organization are

constantly being reworked and reinvented in interaction with changing external conditions. This may be translated for both insiders and outsiders so that they can negotiate more successfully at development interfaces.

I have suggested the potential of Norman Long's 'knowledge interface' approach as a useful framework for working with *indigenous knowledge*. In my estimation, it offers an answer to Marcus's call for a 'strategically situated ethnography' (Marcus1986). Ethnography must be able to capture more accurately the historical context of its subjects and to register the workings of global forces impacting at the local level where fieldwork usually takes place. Analysis must be increasingly multi-vocal, multi-level, and increasingly multi-sited by including the various institutions that come into play.

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