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Author(s): TREVOR W. PURCELL

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# *Indigenous Knowledge and Applied Anthropology: Questions of Definition and Direction*

TREVOR W. PURCELL

The word *indigenous* has been used to refer to specific groups of people defined by the criteria of ancestral territory, collective cultural configuration, and historical location in relation to the expansion of Europe. Since the 1980s, however, the term has evolved beyond its specific empirical reference. Combined with the term *knowledge*, it has come to signify a social science perspective as well as a philosophical and ideological position that rests on recognition of the role of knowledge in the power relations constituted by the expansion of Europe. This article outlines the evolution of this perspective and its relationship to applied anthropology. It argues that the perspective is based on a humanistic unease with the effect of westernization on indigenous peoples, and that this humanistic thinking has deep roots in applied anthropology. Recent studies that support the use of indigenous knowledge in planned social change (development) follow in this vein, and constitute a critique of aspects of Western knowledge. The paper concludes that applied anthropologists should pay greater attention to facilitating the praxis of indigenous autonomy.

**Key words:** applied anthropology, indigenous knowledge, knowledge systems, indigenous autonomy, development

Since the 1980s the term *indigenous* has evolved beyond its specific empirical reference to a group of people defined by ancestral territory and common cultures. Combined with the term *knowledge* it has come to signify a methodology, a social science perspective, and even philosophical and ideological positions, all of which rest on the recognition of the asymmetrical place of knowledge in the power relations historically constituted by the expansion of Europe. This article briefly traces the development of this perspective as it relates to applied anthropology. I argue that the growing emphasis on the use of the knowledge systems of the people among whom applied anthropologists work arises from recognition of the need to balance some inadequacies of Western knowledge in development contexts with local knowledge that is more appropriate to the occasion.

I further argue that this recognition has deep roots in a more general dissatisfaction with the process of Westernization, a

dissatisfaction linked to a humanist tradition associated with the study and understanding of non-Western peoples. I attempt to demonstrate — admittedly all too briefly — that this thinking has firm roots in applied anthropology, and that, with ample help from indigenous resistance outside of the academy, one effect has been to promote greater autonomy for those adversely transformed in the process of westernization.<sup>1</sup> This process forms the empirical foundation for discourse that confronts the question of what is considered relevant knowledge for long-term survival in the face of entrenched hegemonic relations and global ecological threat. Social scientists have a moral responsibility to engage the question of what is efficacious knowledge given the needs of a particular historical moment. By conceptually separating *knowledge* from culture and problematizing *knowledge* and its application, scholars are inserting culture/knowledge into the contemporary discourse as a component of power relations, beyond the notion of cultural division of labor, beyond race, and beyond ethnicity. At a more abstract level, another effect has been an implicit critique of the role of Western knowledge in global development. To establish a modicum of clarity, I attempt to give a working definition of *indigenous knowledge*, as a perspective.

## *Indigenous People, Indigenous Knowledge: Working Definitions*

Since the epistemological revolution of the 17th century, legitimate knowledge in the Western world has been associated with the process of passing scientific muster. That is, knowledge

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*Trevor W. Purcell is Associate Professor in the Africana Studies Program and the Department of Anthropology, University of South Florida, Tampa. This article is a revised version of one presented at the Society for Applied Anthropology annual meeting, April 1994, Cancun, Mexico. The research on which this article is based is part of a larger project which was supported by the Wenner-Gren Foundation for Anthropological Research, grant Gr. 5579, from 1993-96. The author gratefully acknowledges that invaluable support. Much gratitude also goes to Professor Allan Burns, University Florida, for his suggestions on reading material, and to the anonymous reviewers for Human Organization for their keen and constructive comments.*

is understood as that which carries the attributes of incontrovertibility (although at times probabilistic rather than absolute), objectivity, rationality, testability, and finally, the bedrock of positivist legitimacy, replicability or verifiability. Verifiability and replicability imply that not only may something be known, but that the method(s) of discovery must also be known, and further, that the “knowledge” must contain the element of explanation. We should know the causal — or at least the correlational—relations associated with that which is “known.”

Minimally, any proposed link between phenomena and knowledge should rest on a testable hypothesis, and the requirement for testable hypothesis partly defines the quality or type of explanation that is acceptable. A “spiritual” healer may explain a persistent headache not as resulting from physiological phenomena but from neglect of an ancestor. The plausibility of this explanation rests on intuitive understanding within the symbolic structure of the healer’s culture. A scientific explanation, however, must be demonstrable outside of any unique symbolic structure; it must have universality under specified empirical methodological conditions independent of the practitioner’s belief.

This concept of knowing, therefore, excludes that which is known intuitively, even if extrapolated from long-term experience or (uncontrolled) observation. More generally, this type of knowing excludes knowledge that may be considered true only within a specific cultural narrative world, for example, rules of specific cultural practices, origin stories, or folk aphorisms. Causal or correlational links may be postulated, but may not be testable. The Western concept of knowledge, therefore, has not traditionally been applied to much of the emic knowledge of indigenous people, which is largely based precisely on “subjective” historical/cultural experience and uncontrolled, undocumented observations. This is not to suggest that the line between indigenous knowledge and the Western idea of legitimate knowledge is clear-cut; so much of the distinction depends on how one defines the scientific method and its object(s).

Defining the *indigenous* (knowledge and people) is deceptively difficult. It is so, in part, because of the very fact that the category is an invention of colonial history and continues to be affected by the ongoing de-colonization processes. Deciding who is indigenous depends on specific political systems and their policies. The issue is further compounded by variations in the criteria of identification applied by each state, as well as by indigenous peoples themselves (Burger 1987:6-16). In anthropology, the usage of the term *indigenous* gradually superceded the terms *primitive* and *tribal*,<sup>2</sup> both loosely used to designate all seemingly culturally homogenous, non-Caucasian groups encountered as Europeans expanded into the so-called non-Western world. An ethnographic cognate of indigenous is *aboriginal*, used briefly in India by the British to refer to what is today called Scheduled Tribes (Betéille 1997), and today used mainly to refer to Australian autochthons. The term *indigenous* carries a less hegemonic connotation — its etymological root, if not its journey out of Europe, appears to convey less condescension, but more importantly, its current usage by indigenous peoples has largely been self-applied. The term is only marginally more precise in its referent(s) than previous gross appellations, however. Centuries of forced and unforced migration, miscegenation, and cultural assimilation have made identification of the indigenous a contested terrain,

often with very slippery boundaries — as many cases in the US demonstrate (Greenbaum 1993).

In some regions of the world, Betéille (1997:188) reminds us, the designation “as ‘indigenous’ acquires substance when there are other populations in the same region that can reasonably be described as settlers or aliens,” as in Australia or North America. In regions like Islamic Asia and the around the Mediterranean, this contrasting designation is not so clear-cut — especially if the referent of *indigenous* is what used to be called *tribal*. Current usage of *indigenous* appears to be more encompassing than of the term *tribal*, however, covering all peoples permanently occupying a territory at the point of colonial intervention. The question of the link between territory and indigenous peoples will continue to be problematic, and in some cases will ultimately have to be settled under United Nations and sovereign jurisdiction.

Issues related to culture are just as challenging, especially, again, if we use *indigenous* in the same manner we have used *primitive* or *tribal*, i.e., focusing of putatively culturally homogenous, isolated groups, without acknowledgment of the role of colonialism in the designation. As Betéille (1997) rightly points out, language, religion, habitant, and other cultural institutions are difficult, and at times impossible, to be correlated exactly with groups which are strictly defined as indigenous based on autochthony. If, however, we factor in the colonial intervention in the history of such groups, then much — though not all — of the contending factors may be resolvable. Nevertheless, in spite of inherent cultural dynamism and its resultant boundary-blurring character, culture is central to the designation of the indigenous; for one thing, without it the concept of *indigenous knowledge* would be meaningless.

With respect to knowledge *per se*, there is also the unruly issue of whether or not aspects of “Western” knowledge may be considered indigenous (Lieber 1994). Answering this question is beyond this author’s ability and the scope of this article; however, I would like to raise a few pertinent points in this regard. *Western knowledge* implies a set of understandings that include scientific knowledge and methodology as well as what we might call Western *common sense*. But while scientific knowledge and methodology can claim a degree of cultural transcendence, *common sense* is essentially culturally particular. Even if we assume, for the sake of argument, that the common sense systems of the West constitute a single cultural domain, we would still have to distinguish between the domain of common sense — which construes the world through “natural” cognition and symbolic constructions — and science. The latter, though historically founded on common-sensical understandings (Atran 1990), expands on those understandings by codification, experimentation, and empirically-based theoretical explanations.

Having made that distinction, we must recognize that scientific knowledge, *the* authoritative knowledge of the West, is gaining increasing dominance in ordering all aspects of social life. But since science is not culturally relative, it would appear that we cannot grant the existence of a “Western” indigenous knowledge — except to the extent that we could delineate a “culture” of science that is unique to the West. In exploring this issue, we might take as a point of departure the question of whether such a science “culture” may be premised on the distinction between scientific methodology, the universal, and the specific practice or object of science, the particular.

Whatever the answers to the above conundrum, attempts to define indigenous knowledge must consider its political status, that is, its asymmetrical location within the international, intercultural, and interclass relations of power that define and legitimize social, political, ideological and economic practice. The location of indigenous knowledge, whether "Western" or non-Western, as subjugated knowledge in relation to the dominant discourse about "truth" — in Foucaultian terms — has had, and will continue to have, far-reaching implications for global transformation.<sup>3</sup>

In a 1987 global survey of the condition of indigenous peoples, Julian Burger examined definitions used by the United Nations, and by indigenous people themselves, including the World Council of Indigenous Peoples. His definition, my own interpretation of the use of *indigenous* in the International Labor Organization Convention 169 (International Labor Organization 1989), and its usage in periodicals like *Cultural Survival Quarterly*, the *Indigenous Knowledge and Development Monitor*, and *Indigenous Affairs*, are the basis of my construction of the following working definition. *Indigenous people* are existing descendants of non-Western<sup>4</sup> peoples who, in general, continue to occupy their ancestral lands even after conquest by Westerners, or who have been relocated forcibly in the process of colonization. Indigenous people maintain a cultural complex that sets them apart from the Western socio-cultural tradition (Bodley 1990, 1996; Burger 1987; Cultural Survival Quarterly 1992:73). Indigenous people, therefore, stand in a historical relationship of conflict and asymmetry *vis-à-vis* Europeans in that the construction of capitalism was largely achieved through the exploitation of land, labor and symbolic resources previously controlled by non-Europeans. This definition takes into account two key historical/political factors. First, indigenous peoples' drive for self-determination which has contributed to the new emphasis on the application of non-Western knowledges; and second, the location of the process within a global historical conflict of domination and struggle, and the challenge to Western cultural hegemony which inheres in that conflict.

The definition of *indigenous knowledge* (as distinct from indigenous people) follows logically, to a degree, from the definition of indigenous people. Broadly speaking, *indigenous knowledge* is the body of historically constituted (emic) knowledge instrumental in the long-term adaptation of human groups to the biophysical environment. The human group and the biophysical environment mediated by this knowledge constitute human ecology (Bennett 1976; Moran 1990). Based on the history of its usage in applied anthropology, the term *knowledge* here is meant to have a more delimited meaning than the term *culture*;<sup>5</sup> it is meant to denote that which is directly functional in long-term survival. The reason is not simply a matter of antecedent usage; it is intended to place indigenous knowledge on an equitable epistemological plane with — but in analytic contrast to — Western instrumental *scientific* knowledge (I discuss this further below). Anthropologists, however, understand culture to be a relatively integrated whole. Therefore, depending on the circumstances, any aspect of culture that functions toward the long-term survival of a group may theoretically be treated as indigenous knowledge, according to the definition sketched here (Barsh 1997; Dove and Kammen 1997; Kurin 1983).

The concept of *indigenous people* has definitional problems similar to those of *indigenous knowledge*. The definition of

*indigenous people* is limited by the criterion of "ancestral territory," while the definition of *indigenous knowledge* is not. The primary concern here is with a view of *indigenous knowledge* which, by this definition, allows us to consider the knowledge system of people who are not indigenous by the criterion of ancestral territory. These people, as with specific groups of Africans in the diaspora (e.g., Saramaka Maroons and Gullah people of the Carolinas), may retain a more coherent body of ancestral knowledge than, for example, some relatively assimilated native Central or South American *campesinos* who are indeed indigenous by the criterion of territory. The definition also suggests that while there is clearly indigenous knowledge in the Western world across many ethnic groups, the body of Western knowledge that is judged to be founded on scientific criteria may be too abstracted from any specific cultural genesis (as discussed earlier) to be considered indigenous.

Since the 1980s there has been a growing popular tendency to apply the word *indigenous* to all that pertains to or is initiated within local, national or regional populations in Less Developed Countries.<sup>6</sup> The term has come to take on aspects of the word "native," in the sense of being born in a particular place, and without any specific historical parameters. In such a context, it may be appropriate to apply the terms *folk knowledge* or *local knowledge* instead — in all cases we are dealing with autochthonous phenomena even though its historical roots may be relatively shallow. This popular usage, however, has direct academic relevance. Interest in the study and application of indigenous knowledge — or indigenous praxis as a transformative process — logically implies indigenous people assuming relative autonomy. This *praxis* then, can be — indeed has been — extended to territorially non-indigenous communities and nations acting on their own behalf, in accordance with the dictates of their own history and political culture. This, in a most general sense, we might refer to as the *indigenous perspective*.<sup>7</sup> While the positions of scholars vary on what an indigenous perspective means for the actors, the common assumption is undoubtedly that indigenous/folk/local groups should determine, informed by their cultural knowledge, their own historical destiny — with the anthropologist as facilitator or broker. The indigenous perspective, then, represents the meeting point between the evolution of an academic discipline, anthropology, and wider historical forces, a terrain that has long shaped applied anthropology.

### *Indigenous Knowledge and the Application of Anthropological Knowledge*

The central question of this discussion is whether there is a historical basis for this mode of thinking in applied anthropology. In addressing the question I will bypass the obvious argument that for anthropologists to position their work so as to promote culturally relative autonomy is only to be consistent with the incontrovertible (though by no means absolute) theory of cultural relativity (Bastide 1973). Instead, I will focus on a more intellectual-historical argument which, in itself, is an extension of the cultural relativism argument. The argument is that the indigenous perspective arises logically out of the humanist critique within the discipline of anthropology, a critique that is rooted in an uneasiness with the posture of Western civilization *vis-à-vis* indigenous peoples.<sup>8</sup> For brevity

and convenience of discussion, I shall confine my exploration to three periods of applied anthropological activity, periods that have very blurred boundaries:<sup>9</sup> (1) the external and internal colonialism phase, (2) the World War II phase, and (3) the development anthropology phase. My discussion is not intended to be a *history* but merely to locate a concern for indigenous knowledge within a broader context of a critique of the colonial process and its hegemonic consequences. For this, I beg the reader's indulgence.

### *External and Internal Colonialism*

General anthropology was born out of applied anthropology, and applied anthropology, like sociology, grew out of a humanitarian desire to find a sense of order in a world driven by the idea of progress and its warrant for global hegemony (Bastide 1973; Bennett 1996; Lowie 1937). Decades ago, Linton lamented the fact that we had not yet learned to control social forces even though the "conquest" of society is more important than that of interplanetary space (Bastide 1973; Linton 1936). Kluckhohn argued that further progress in the natural sciences — which form the basis of scientific and technological progress — without solution of the more important social, emotional and intellectual problems can only introduce more "disadaptation, incomprehension, and social unrest and, consequently, more wars and revolutions" (Bastide 1973:1-2). The application of anthropological knowledge was one solution to this historical problem. Early anthropologists — beginning with "scientific" anthropology in the latter half of 19th century to early part of 20th century — felt the natives had to be moved through the stages from savagery to civilization. That posed a duty as well as a problem; the duty was to civilize, the problem was how to achieve it.

A rational anthropology, taking its cue from natural sciences and later from sociology, began to seek the laws of society in order to "rationalize" and repair society. But anthropologists soon discovered that the natives resisted change, at times, resisting with their lives. Bastide (1973:13) points out that Lévy-Bruhl, making a Hobbesian distinction between pre-logical and logical mentality argued that the change from one to the other was difficult if not impossible. This was an indictment of evolutionism and an indirect, ethnocentric, endorsement of relativism. For many anthropologist, however — in spite of the general acceptance of some form of relativism — the feeling was that, left to themselves, the natives will change toward the West anyway. Hence, the undying dilemma of applied anthropologists: How to respect cultural relativism while helping the "natives" move toward or adjust to modernity.

The earliest organized efforts at the application of anthropological knowledge to practical social issues began with the training of "practitioner anthropologists" in Europe, and the hiring of anthropologists in the United States by policy research organizations. On both side of the Atlantic these anthropologists were, in general, hired to act in the interest of a dominant culture seeking to control the volatile boundary between the indigenous and the non-indigenous. On both sides of the Atlantic, however, the experience of the anthropologist in carrying out this mandate led to the creation of another boundary, a far more ambiguous one. A division grew between the anthropologists' view of the world constructed through the

convergence of science and field experience on the one hand, and the ideological position and political economic goals of the those who hired them, on the other. Unlikely as it might seem, this nexus of ambiguity has been the seedbed of humanism in applied anthropology. What often was conceived with purely political economic intentions ended up giving birth to something of a more redeeming nature.

One of the earliest applied anthropology projects, the 1801 *Dictionary of Malay Tongue* by James Howison, "a member of the Asiatic Society," was explicitly intended to promote colonial trade, so that promoting every means of facilitating communication between us and the Malays became a matter of national importance (Firth 1981:194).

Later, in the British tradition, ethnographic records were amassed on land tenure, such as the records of the New Zealand Native Land Court with its immense amount of genealogical and sociological information. This system was to become a model for the collection of similar types of information in Africa and other British colonial territories. The understanding arising from this information was to contribute to the perceived need for the formation of the Aborigines Protection Society, formed in Great Britain in 1838 (van Willigen 1991:11). Five years later the Society assumed a more professional posture under the name of the Ethnological Society of London. By the mid-to late-1800s, interest blossomed in practical topical areas such as the role of ritual and beliefs in the regulation of family relations and property rights.

Perhaps the area of early applied anthropology that attracted the most critical attention was the training of colonial administrators, mainly in Great Britain but also in France, Netherlands, Belgium, and other countries. By 1904, Sir Richard Temple, a British colonial administrator with extensive service in India, addressed the Antiquarian Society of Cambridge University "On the Practical Value of Anthropology" (Fortes 1953; Temple 1914:57-90 in Firth 1981). His efforts contributed to the establishment of anthropology courses for British overseas officers, and the routine preparation of anthropological reports by colonial administrators in the field. In later years, a number of "government anthropologists" were appointed, including R. S. Rattray and C. K. Meek in West Africa, F. E. Williams and E. W. P. Chinnery in New Guinea, and V. Elwin in India (Firth 1981:194).

The early pathways of the formation of the British Empire were simultaneously the pathways of early anthropology, and the discipline is rightly criticized accordingly, a criticism largely directed at the work of anthropologists during the colonial scramble for territory in Africa and Asia. But although anthropologists acted in the service of colonial expansion, with the clarity of hindsight, we can also recognize that most sought to accomplish the paradoxical task of humanizing colonialism. Firth notes that most anthropologists were indeed critical of colonialism:

(W)hen in the field, social anthropologists reflected on the human conditions of the peoples they were studying, they were apt to be quite critical of aspects of the colonialist position in the use of land and labor, and toward educational policy, which disregarded customary norms of the people concerned (1981:194).

Firth's own training conditioned him to look at "the effects of Western technology, economic enterprise, and political

pressures on traditional communities... (W)as one supposed to be making a contribution to industrial welfare or to profits?" (1981:196-97). In 1929, when Malinowski called for a practical anthropology to assist "colonial control," he saw anthropology — then commonly referred to as the "science of man" — as having the same potential for contributing to society as physics and geology had played in engineering (Malinowski 1929). He felt that knowledge of cultures of both the colonizers and the colonized would, through understanding, create a more humane colonial system. To that end, he proposed studying the "white savage side by side with the coloured" (Escobar 1991:661). From the perspective of present-day social science, those anthropologists can be understood as being in a quasi-objective, temporarily liminal position, mediating the friction-laden meeting points of colonial oppression to the benefit — unequal though it was — of both sides.

Malinowski's position was far from revolutionary. Nevertheless, it has important implications for a critical applied anthropology, for behind it lay dissatisfaction not just with colonialism but with the whole Western edifice, particularly with the epitome of its knowledge system, science. A 1930 article on "the rationalization of anthropology and administration" begins with the passage: "Science is the worst nuisance and the greatest calamity of our days. It has made us into robots, into standardized interchangeable parts of an enormous mechanism...it transforms our inner selves with an uncannily thoroughgoing penetration" (Malinowski 1930:405). Later in the same article he followed with the lament:

And now, after twenty years of anthropological work, I find myself, to my disgust, attempting to make the science of man into as bad and dehumanizing an agency to man as physics, chemistry, and biology have been for the last century or so denaturalizing to nature...As soon as the study of man becomes 'rationalized' it will proceed as ruthlessly to dehumanize human nature as science is even now obliterating the natural face of the inanimate world. And yet the process is inevitable...(1930:406)

The anthropologist Roger Bastide sees Malinowski's position as representing the ideal applied anthropologist, one who achieved a dialectical synthesis of practical and theoretical concerns: Malinowski's functionalist theory of natural needs (Malinowski 1944) was in partnership with his call for exposing colonial administrators to anthropological training. And, as with the general teleological functionalist thinking that took hold of the field, it sought to address questions of the very nature of humanity and its drive for transcendence (Sahlins 1996:399). These purposes grew out of the recognition that, given the ravages of colonialism, anthropology must no longer throw itself into the search for a hypothetical past (referring to the passionate concern with evolutionary theories) but should instead seek to reconstruct indigenous societies to a pre-colonial state suggested by ethnographies. It was clearly an impossible goal, but the point is well taken.

Malinowski's call may have been a scream, and his criticism of science harsh, but his desire to humanize colonial control was not unique. A noteworthy effort in the US was the founding of the Bureau of American Ethnology (BAE), by an act of Congress some 40 years before Malinowski's statement. Like Malinowski, John Wesley Powell, founder and director for 23 years, saw science as the only reliable basis for social policy

— and his notion of science was, like Malinowski's, inductive and practical (Hinsley 1979:15).

The BAE was the first government-funded anthropological body in the US. It arose from the need to address increasing Native American-White conflict churned up by relentless frontier expansion. By the 1870s the frontier push was strangling Native American existence. Powell told a Congressional committee: "There is now no great uninhabited and unknown region to which the Indian can be sent...He is among us and we must either protect him or destroy him" (Fowler and Fowler 1971:119, quoted in Hinsley 1979:18). Powell was later to reaffirm standing US policy of placing American Indians on reservations. The intention was to transform them into agrarian communities, a move quite consistent with the evolutionary "chain-of-being" concept common in 19th century anthropology.

Much of the humanitarian thinking of that period had roots in the Lewis Henry Morgan school of evolutionary anthropology as well as in Christian humanitarianism. William W. Turner, resident philologist at the Smithsonian during the 1950s, praised missionary Cyrus Byington for his 30 years of linguistic and religious work among the Choctaw. Turner noted, "Where man once looked selfishly to themselves and hostilely to others ... they were now beginning to perceive God's same 'wise harmony of plan' among the multifarious races of men as among other natural wonders of nature" (Hinsley 1979:17). Anthropology acquiesced in the Christianization of the "heathen" American Indian even as it helped to cleanse the White observer of ignorance and prejudice (1979:17).

The solutions suggested for the so-called "Indian problem" of the time would hardly meet the criteria of self-determination today. In 1897, BAE anthropologist Frank Hamilton Cushing delivered a lecture entitled "The need for studying the Indian in order to teach him." "Learn how he became what he is," Cushing argued, "and thus learn how to make him other than what he is" (Hinsley 1979:28). The idea of anthropology "protecting" the American Indian says more about the anthropologists' conception (or misconception) of the colonial social/ethnic hierarchy and its hegemonic consequences than about the American Indian's need for protection. Nevertheless, by basing improvement of American Indian-White relationship on the scientific requirement for greater knowledge, the anthropologist came to "know" not only the violated American Indian but the White violator, among whom were some anthropologists.

Later, as American interest turned to empire building — especially with acquisition of former Spanish territories after the Spanish American War of 1898 — the concern in the country, and thereby in the BAE, was on the implications of the White Americans interbreeding with Blacks, Native Americans, and Asians. Smithsonian secretary Samuel Langley quickly saw a role for anthropology:

Science can have no greater purpose than to lay the foundation for the future molding of the racial destinies of the United States — to so determine the results of the mingling of white, black, red, and yellow races on the longevity, fecundity, vigor, liability to disease, moral and intellectual qualities, and to so fully understand the operations of heredity and the effects of changing social and climatic conditions, as to frame and administer wise laws regarding these subjects, and to direct the policy of the thousands of institutions that deal with the racial welfare of the nation (Langley 1904, as quoted in Hinsley 1979:26).

The view was endorsed by none other than the inventor Alexander Graham Bell, a Smithsonian regent and proponent of eugenics. Thankfully, it was Franz Boas, however, who demonstrated, to the enduring disappointment of White supremacists, that it was culture, not genes, nurture, not nature, that determined behavioral differences in human beings (Boas 1911 [1938]).

Much of what the BAE had to say, however, was contrary to the mood of American society. Always taking pains to maintain scientific autonomy in the face of outside political pressures and lack of Congressional funding, the BAE, and anthropology in general, failed to enlighten Congress or the public on immediate national concerns. Nevertheless, "...beneath the evolutionary litany and the condescending ethnocentrism of Washington anthropology lay a rumbling discontent with American civilization, a profound sense of loss" (Hinsley 1979:30).

### *The World War II Years*

Many anthropologists, including Franz Boas (who was a pacifist during World War I), had deep reservations about entering the World War II, but that did not last. Margaret Mead explains: "Before Pearl Harbor, there were many dissonant voices among American anthropologists... The German invasion of Russia and the attack by the Japanese on Pearl Harbor ended these disagreements (*sic*), made it possible for organized groups of anthropologists to take the initiative of wholehearted participation in the war effort" (1979:146).

In addition to the violation of Western political ideals by Japan and Germany, Nazism violated one of the deepest paradigms of cultural anthropology of the time, the *psychic unity* of humankind (Mead 1979:146). This paradigm was rooted in comparative ethnography and in no small way bolstered anthropological humanism. Anthropologists, including some of the most well known names of the day — Gregory Bateson, Elliot Chapple, Margaret Mead, Lawrence Frank, and Ruth Benedict — willingly loaned their services to their government in the war effort. The task was to develop cultural knowledge of adversaries and allies alike, knowledge that would facilitate policy formulation based on predictable cultural patterns.

Outside of the war itself, anthropologists were active in a number of related areas, such as assisting with the regulation of race relations,<sup>10</sup> and setting nutritional standards to alleviate potential problems occasioned by the wartime need to ration food supplies (Bastide 1973:22). This period of policy-oriented work was to set the foundation for significant contributions to anthropology in the areas of population and demography studies, food and nutrition, human lactation, linguistics, and technology transfer. This period also saw the development of the Cross Cultural Index (subsequently transformed into the Human Relations Area Files) (Angrosino 1976; Mead 1979:152-154). Indeed, the Institute of Social Anthropology, founded in 1943 by Julian Steward, then ethnologist at the Smithsonian's Bureau of American Ethnology, was devised specifically for this type of research (Foster 1979:205-216).<sup>11</sup> Its explicit aim was to provide the type of information that would facilitate US interest *and* modernization (Foster 1979:212). Among anthropologists, a central concern was the impact of technology on non-Western peoples (Mead 1953; Spicer 1952).

Noble as the effort against Nazism was, it is difficult to discern any significant advancement in the universal humanist posture of the discipline arising out of this period. Anthropologists were united in a narrow nationalist interest. Yet the stoic desire for scientific independence and the conviction that science ought to heal rather than hurt humanity kept nagging at these anthropologists. The legacy of the war efforts turned out to be distrust of government. Mead expresses some of those feelings: "By that time we had also clarified our recognition that 'black' or covert activities were always destructive of later national purposes" (1979:153-154). And while there was renewed faith in the application of science to human issues (Angrosino 1976), the war period was to lead to a lull in applied anthropological activities<sup>12</sup> in the 1960s and early 1970s. This was due in part to disenchantment with continued efforts at neo-colonial domination as well as government duplicity in efforts such as Project Camelot, discussed below (Horowitz 1974). This was, in many ways, a period of baptism by fire.

### *Development Anthropology*

The emergence of development anthropology in the 1970s and 1980s is marked more by precipitating events outside of the field of anthropology than by insights within the field itself. The increase in poverty and related debt crisis of the 1970s, exacerbated in some measure by the emphasis on "free market" economics and rising discontent of the Reagan years, created ideal conditions for enthusiastic re-involvement of anthropologists in applied work. Add to this the "renewed recognition of... ethnic diversity, and realization of the cultural dimension of an apparent 'globalization' of regional economies and human technologies" (Fiske and Chambers 1996:2) — both inside and outside of anthropology. There were also two agreeable coincidences: the availability of academic positions was decreasing in relation to the number of anthropologists being trained, and the federal government increased allocation of money for policy research (van Willigen 1991:6). Kushner (1994), however, takes issue with the argument that the growth of applied anthropology was in response to declining academic jobs; he views it as more accurately a "newer variant of traditional training" (Kushner 1994:187). In any case, according to Escobar (1991), the take-off point of development anthropology was the formulation of a "New Directions" mandate for the US Agency for International Development (AID):

Development experts and agencies, having become discontent with the poor results of technology and capital-intensive top-down interventions, developed a new sensitivity toward the social and cultural factors in their programs. Moreover, they began to realize that the poor themselves had to participate actively in the programs if these were to have a reasonable margin of success (1991:663).

This was a watershed: the turn from top-down development to a relatively feeble participatory mode. It came, however, on the heels of a post-World War II period that emphasized "modernization" married instrumentally to foreign assistance (Foster 1979). Four related sets of historical factors set this foundation:

1. The United States emerged victorious from World War II with a powerful industrial base. This was in part responsible for the success of the Marshall Plan, a success which affirmed in the minds of many, the supremacy of industrial capitalism.

2. The mid-century decolonization efforts gave birth to many new but economically and institutionally poor and vulnerable nation states in Africa, Asia and the Caribbean. These states were not only new, with inexperienced leaders, but also were the seedbed of unmet expectations and contending class forces. US attention, in the form of aid-with-strings-attached, was therefore directed to the emerging nations under the guise of promoting stability.

3. This purported promotion of stability occurred in the context of the Cold War and competition with Soviet support for revolutionary movements in the new and emergent states.

4. Finally, the 1960s and 1970s were the decades of corporate multinational expansion, partly to take advantage of cheap labor and rising consumerism abroad, and partly to cater to a US policy of Third World industrialization by invitation.

The combination of these factors lead, on the one hand, to US and other Western industrial states' support for programs of modernization and foreign assistance, and on the other hand, to Third World activists' and scholars' resistance to the renewed dependency inherent in this process of modernization.

The onset of this period was a relatively inactive one for applied anthropology (Escobar 1991:662; Foster 1979; Grillo 1985:1-36). Nevertheless, a few anthropologists were involved, if not in direct applied projects, at least in policy-oriented research. By the 1970s, and certainly by the Reagan era, modernization was beginning to be perceived, primarily outside of the metropolitan countries, as part of the problem rather than the solution. Poverty persisted, even increased; the gap between the contending classes widened, and social pathology such as drugs and violent crime became commonplace (Hobart 1993).

In the climate of the 1970s, multi-lateral funding institutions such as the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund (IMF) turned their attention to issues of persistent poverty, making funds available to address issues of health, nutrition, small-scale economic projects and family planning. The ensuing shift in policy lead to, among other changes, the World Bank's 1975 Rural Development Policy Paper. While demonstrating recognition of the failure of development, this policy, however, showed persistence in the face of change; it "still sought the 'modernization' of 'traditional societies'" understood as their incorporation into the world economy (Escobar 1991:663-664). To be sure, anthropologists participated, often uncritically but with humanitarian intentions, in projects of the period characterized by this thinking. Nevertheless, naiveté and, no doubt, professional and disciplinary insecurity, as well as career ambition, often got in the way. The explanations given by some anthropologists for their involvement in the notorious Project Camelot of the mid-1960s illustrates the point.

Project Camelot was designed by the US Army's Special Operations Research Office (SORO) to assess the potential for civil war within Third World nations, to suggest solutions, and to derive predictive mechanisms for determining events in such nations. Anthropologists who were employed on the project predictably were allowed to have little or no influence over the intentions of the military. Yet, amid the individual and disciplinary reasons given for participating in Project Camelot were such humanitarian — if naïve — rationales as the need to

educate the army. Also, as Horowitz puts it, there was "...a profound conviction of the perfectibility of mankind, particularly in the possibility of the military establishment performing a major role in this general process of growth... (T)here was (also) a shared belief that *Pax Americana* was severely threatened and deserved to know its own future" (Horowitz 1974:6-7). This may be little more than rationalizations concocted under severe criticism from colleagues. Nevertheless, in itself, the perceived need to rationalize suggests an underlying unease in going against not just scientific integrity but the moral posture of anthropology.

### *Socio-historical Context and the Attention to Indigenous Knowledge*

The critique of the hegemonic colonial past implied in the systematic usage of local knowledge in development projects did not arise in a vacuum. It occurred in the context of a history that took several turns during the 1960s and 1970s, all toward the destination of a form of anthropology more respectful of the culture and the history of the peoples studied. More importantly, it emerged out of ferment in which indigenous/folk/local groups struggled for one form or another of decolonization.

This was a period of social crisis and critique, evidenced by the "cultural revolution" in the US and massive student protests in countries such as France and Mexico. The debates regarding the Vietnam War, the Civil Rights movement, and the decolonization movement throughout the extant and former colonies found their way into the consciousness of anthropologists, many of whom joined with their own "statements" of protest (Belshaw 1976; Wolf and Jorgensen 1970). In an article entitled "Where are We Going, If Anywhere? A Look at Post Civilization," Boulding notes that civilization has created numerous destructive "traps" such as massive wars, population growth and a technology which "is fundamentally suicidal" (1962:164-67).

The critique of the West forced social scientists to pay closer attention to how non-Western peoples view the world. Early anthropologists had done this, but primarily with the basic research purpose of understanding the species — issues of cultural evolution, the integration of social institutions, purported racial hierarchies, and so on. Early anthropologists, applying the scientific ideal of the time, treated culture and society in the same way the natural sciences treated their object: as an objective entity separate from the observer, knowable via the observer's mental or psychological inference without much reflexive help from the observed. The emic perspective was viewed by the discipline as not lending itself to the grand, testable generalizations required by science. This was the anthropology aptly described by Clifford Geertz in a later work as "laws-and-causes social physics" (Geertz 1983:1).

The other side of the uncritical positivism is a problem as much political as it is philosophical. In the early days of the discipline, most anthropologists followed on the heels of colonial administrators, missionaries and diverse adventurers, most from Europe. Convinced of their own position at the very top of the "chain of being" (Lovejoy 1936), Europeans (and those of European heritage) saw the rest of the world, including

those whom they studied, as evolutionary “infants” and treated them accordingly (Asad 1973; Gough 1968; Hymes 1974). The knowledge systems of the “other,” their thoughts, their definitions of selfhood, could not be placed in the same epistemological or analytical balance as that of the “European” anthropologist. The set of increasingly encompassing geopolitical power relations that we call colonialism was deeply rooted in the epistemological dyad of the knowing subject and the unknowing object (of study).

It could be argued that the historical conditions were not yet mature for attention to the emic knowledge of people studied by anthropologists; that the indigenous perspective has now come about because of a clear transparency in the relations of power, a transparency that had to await its historical moment. Even so, anthropologists bear some responsibility. In almost none of the classical ethnographies up to the 1950s, such as Evans-Pritchard 1940; Firth 1936; Fortes 1949; Leach 1954; Malinowski 1922; and Radcliffe-Brown 1922, did international power relations figure into the systematizing theories constructed on the study of indigenous peoples. Anthropology had to wait for dependency theory and world system theory in order to begin to clear this boundary, a process that was weakly prefigured in Redfield’s folk-urban continuum and more vigorously in the works of such Marxist-influenced approaches as Mintz, Wolf, and Steward.

In the 1960s and 1970s, Levi-Strauss’s structuralism, benefiting from Marxian analysis, became popular. At about this time, Marxian analysis itself gained greater attention as much for the recognition within the academy of its analytic insights as for its political relevance in Third World and indigenous struggles. This was a period of nationalist churning throughout the newly independent countries, and the whole colonial edifice, including its intellectual buttresses, came in for renewed questioning. In anthropology, the work of Geertz popularized hermeneutic anthropology in the US, and this helped to strengthen the theory of cultural relativism, contributing to a very liberating view of people as constructing their own worlds, in their own cultural image. In methodological terms, the process was helped along by *ethnoscience*, which sought to discover internal meaning and intention associated with particular behavioral events.

The general social and intellectual groundswell of the 1960s and 1970s affected not only the epistemological underpinnings of anthropology but also the political content of the discipline. This swell carried in the era of “engaged” anthropology. As Fardon so aptly observes in reference to the period:

...a relevant anthropology was to be resituated closer to philosophy grappling with the problems of meanings and translation. And this approach could avail itself of a liberal critique in the suggestion that failure to appreciate the self-defining nature of human subjects would lead to an abrogation from non-Western societies of the right to determine their own meanings — just as their rights of political and economic self-determination had been abrogated by earlier phases of Western imperialism (1985:4).

The period produced efforts to promote autonomy and minority rights through institutions such as Cultural Survival in the US, the Minority Rights Group in Great Britain, and the International Work Group for Indigenous Affairs in Denmark.

### *The International Context: The United Nations and the International Labor Organization*

The 1980s occasioned a significant improvement in United Nations (UN) and International Labor Organization (ILO) efforts toward indigenous rights. The December 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights became the philosophical foundation for the Working Group in Indigenous Populations (WGIP), created in 1982 under the structure of the UN Sub-Commission on the Prevention of Discrimination and Protection of Minorities. The Sub-Commission appointed José R. Martínez Cabo to head the first comprehensive study of the problem of discrimination against indigenous populations (Perkins 1992).

From 1957 until 1982, however, the International Labor Organization (ILO) was the only international law body with any explicit concern for indigenous rights (Perkins 1992:4). The ILO identified serious biases in its 1957 Convention 107, and this, in conjunction with the Martínez Cabo study, led to the formulation of Convention 169. This Convention now recognizes and advocates a significant degree of cultural and territorial autonomy for indigenous peoples.

Besides UN and ILO Conventions, perhaps the most significant event to arise from the general ferment and exposure of the 1970s and 1980s was the UN Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED) held in Rio de Janeiro in 1992. Its most outstanding accomplishment, in philosophical direction, is the official linking of economic development with environmental issues. This was no small victory for indigenous peoples, since it is economic development based on the logic of unbridled growth that destroys indigenous territories.<sup>13</sup> The details of this link are codified in Agenda 21, the body of recommendations arising from the conference and endorsed by the UN General Assembly in Resolution 47/190.

This, in brief, was the socio-historical context for the first attempts to systematically determine and utilize indigenous (or emic) knowledge in development. The practice itself, until recently, distinguished the use of the term *indigenous knowledge* from the term *culture*. That is, the attention to specific areas of knowledge having socioeconomic implications for the relative autonomy of indigenous and other peoples marginalized by centuries of European expansion, and the more recent aggressive globalization capitalism.

### *The Indigenous Knowledge Approach*

The 1970s-1980s marked the watershed in which a growing number of anthropologists turned their attention to exploring how indigenous knowledge and institutions could contribute to more culturally appropriate, sustainable development. Much of the path-breaking work centered around issues of agricultural and environmental practices, areas of immediate concern for survival (S. H. Davis 1993; Guillet 1987; Kurin 1983; Meehan 1980; Warren 1993, 1991a). This body of work was based on the recognition that capitalist transformation threatened local communities and ecological systems and is therefore unsustainable. It was also based on the realization that indigenous people are not only more keenly aware of their needs than are outside “developers,” but that those needs are culturally defined, demanding a substantive, instead of a formal,

appreciation (Escobar 1991; Grillo 1985; Hill 1986; Hobart 1993; Norgaard 1994; Sachs 1992). The recognition of a culturally relative definition of the satisfaction of needs is crucial, for the most contested or threatened resources — land resource base and healthy environment — are those on which the survival of indigenous peoples (and indigenous knowledge) depend. In this process, two tendencies have become clear. One is emphasis on the study and use of indigenous knowledge (IK) itself, and the other is a ecological-sustainable development perspective. Some of the pioneers (in the US) of the IK approach are represented in an anthology, *Indigenous Knowledge Systems and Development*, edited by Brokensha, Warren, and Werner (1980).<sup>14</sup> The authors cover a range of ethnographic settings (from Latin America to Africa to Asia), and a variety of theoretical and methodological positions. The common theme, however, was that knowledge and experience are viewed as covarying with local ecology, human geography, age, gender, and class conditions.

Later studies in this vein include taxonomies of potato species in the Andes and their relationship to suitability of soil types, codification of seasons, organization of labor, and nutrition (Brush 1980); studies of soil management in Peru focusing on decision-making rules regarding management and use of soil (Furbee 1989; Guillet 1987; 1989); and Mbeere (Kenya) knowledge of vegetation and its direct relevance to development (Brokensha and Riley 1980).

The methodological approach of early studies has tended to be cognitive and ethnoscientific (Barlett 1980; C. H. Gladwin 1980). An offshoot of this approach has been a number of *knowledge-based* or *expert systems* studies intended specifically to refine the cognitive methodology applied to decision making (Benfer *et al.* 1991; Furbee 1989; R. Davis 1986; C. H. Gladwin 1975; Reed and Behrens 1989). As consciousness of the potential contribution of indigenous knowledge to the creation of a sustainable world rises, pertinent studies have adopted more general ethnographic interpretive methods (Chaiken and Fleuret 1990). They include agricultural and forestry knowledge (Anderson 1990; Dei 1990; Kurin 1983; Mook and Rhoades 1992; Moran 1990; Warren 1993; 1991a; 1991b; Warren *et al.* 1995); ecological and environmental knowledge and ecopolitics (Callicott 1994; Conklin and Graham 1995; Ghai and Vivian 1992; Johnson 1974; Posey 1991; Serageldin and Steer 1994; World Bank 1993); issues of resource management and property rights (Cultural Survival Quarterly 1991; 1995; Olson 1990); and health and healing (Cultural Survival Quarterly 1988).

Some approaches, such as a group of books reviewed in *Latin American Research Review* (Collier 1991), transcend the classic interpretive ethnographic boundaries to include historical materialist and postmodernist thinking. They include examination of the reciprocal and collective relations in *milpa* cultivation (Bonfil Batalla 1987), traditional architecture and family relations (Barthelemy and Meyer 1988), and the conflict of indigenous and capitalist property relations (Greenberg 1989).

As noted earlier, indigenous knowledge is no longer confined to knowledge systems associated with people whose indigenous status is defined by ancestral territory. As colonialism uprooted indigenous peoples, it also uprooted their knowledge systems. But these systems adjust and persist in new environments. The focus on indigenous knowledge, therefore, now includes a more

general examination of local culture and its role in planned change. Recent examples include a number of cases treating the relationship between culture and development in Latin America and the Caribbean (Kleymeyer 1994).

My own work on folk cooperative economic institutions in the Caribbean (influenced to some degree by Brokensha) falls into this category. The folk institution I've studied so far is the rotating credit association (RCA), earlier interpreted by Geertz (1962) as an institution based on traditional sodality that aids in adjustment to modernity. This institution would, however, wither away once integration into modernity makes cultural solidarity unnecessary. My RCA research questions this position, and argues in turn that such solidary institutions — currently in practice in grassroots development — have important lessons for sustainable, planned social change (Purcell 1995; Stoffle and Purcell 1997).

RCAs are found in many areas of the world: Asia, Africa, the Caribbean and Latin America. The RCAs that survive in the Caribbean are derived from West Africa and are still contain the central indigenous features. Ardener defines RCA as an association formed by a core of participants who agree to make regular contributions to a fund which is given, in whole or in part, to each contributor in cyclical rotation (1964:201; 1995). It is at root a savings institution, but it may also function as a loan institution (Chhetri 1995:451). RCAs allow participants flexible but assured access to a relatively large sum of money or material. They are, however, savings and loan institutions with a significant social difference: they are based not on a singular, impersonal economic rationality but on a dual logic of material gain and cultural solidarity; in other words, the RCA represents a case of a transparently embedded informal economy (Polanyi 1957). The cultural solidarity necessary for the institution to function, is rooted in a value, *trust*, which is in turn rooted in pre-established communal/reciprocal relationships. Furthermore, the RCA, as a process serves, among its other functions, to solidify, perpetuate and even expand such networks of relationships (Chhetri 1995).

In a 1962 study of RCAs in Southeast Asia and West Africa, Geertz focused on the process of modernization and concluded that RCA was a “middle rung” institution, serving to educate and thereby ease the transition in the shift from traditionalistic agrarian society to an increasingly fluid, rational commercial economy. He theorized that as people became fully integrated into the modern economy, the irrational, tradition-bound RCA would lose its viability.

More recently, some scholars (Bonnett 1981; Chhetri 1995; Kurtz 1973; Laughlin 1993; Vélez-Ibañez 1982; 1983) have interpreted the RCA as not merely as a folk institution (with a gratuitous incubating role for rational economics), but as a mechanism that allows people to cope with poverty. RCAs survive partly *because* of the ills of economic rationality rather than as a transition to rational economics.

Bonnett's and Vélez-Ibañez' studies document RCAs among Mexican and Caribbean immigrants in the United States, many of whom are clearly middle class. My own study suggests that there is growing participation by urban professionals, including university faculty, in RCAs in Jamaica and Barbados. The RCA did not move these participants into the rational economy; they were already involved in it. Vélez-Ibañez' research, as well as my own, suggests that one reason people participate is precisely the enduring social solidarity that RCAs maintain and foster

— the very factor that Geertz and others postulated as making RCAs obsolete.

The efficacy (and longevity) of the RCA rests on its combination of cultural as well as economic rewards. We might view this in more universal political economic terms by relating it to the *tragedy of the commons* metaphor (Hardin 1968). The metaphor, which encapsulates the human dilemma inherent in exponential population growth in a condition of limited natural resources, states that in a universe of free-rider behavior and limited common resources, self-interested (myopic) but rational maximizers will, by exercising their rights to rational gain, destroy the commons. For society to function, therefore, a leviathan power is needed to ensure preservation of limited resources for common good. The Caribbean RCA contradicts the selfish rationality of the commons, allowing shared individual interest — economic and social — to be achieved efficiently within the boundaries of a defined group. The survival of RCAs in the Caribbean attests to the power of indigenous institutions not simply to persist against the odds but to resist the disintegrative effects of modernization.

### *The Ecoliberals*

The second tendency, the ecological-sustainable development emphasis, is not new in applied anthropology. It has, however, blossomed since the 1980s (see for example Boggs 1990; Blackburn and Anderson 1993; Cameron 1996; Dove and Kammen 1997; Moock and Rhoades 1992). A significant facilitating step in the application of anthropological knowledge to ecological problems — indigenous and non-indigenous — has been the legal mandate provided under the National Environmental Policy Act of 1969 (NEPA). The act provided a role for anthropology—as well as other disciplines such as biologists and ecologists — by requiring environmental impact statements each time a program or project that may affect the environment is under consideration. Much of the research in this area has been controversial, raising questions regarding the nature and efficacy of applied anthropology (Boggs 1990). Nevertheless, this work has contributed significantly to indigenous welfare in the US, as well as to applied anthropology as a whole (Geisler *et al.* 1982; Jorgensen *et al.*; 1985 Nordstrom *et al.* 1977).

Efforts to save the dwindling rain forest over the past two decades, however, have given rise to a school of thought I refer to as *ecoliberalism*. The term refers to a body of scholarly work and a set of economic endeavors that combine political and economic liberalism with the desire to mitigate environmental degradation. The effort is premised on the rapidly increasing evidence that the spread of capitalism is destined to destroy the ecology of critical areas of the planet. Instead of taking a hands-off position regarding ecological systems — as some radical environmentalists would have it — the ecoliberal position aims at helping to integrate people into the capitalist market on their own terms, treating elements of their local ecosystems as “extractive” resources. The goal is to assist local peoples in marketing the products of their territory in accordance with sustainable and self-reliant economic principles rooted in their culture. This process, as with all forms of adjustment to globalization, is one of cultural and economic hybridization (Escobar 1995).

Some of the scholars associated with this school of thought are ethnobotanists, “most notably from the New York Botanical Gardens and Kew Gardens in London” (Hammond 1994:3). A well-known American ethnobotanist and proponent of this point of view is Darrell Posey (who has also done work on intellectual property rights; see Posey 1991; Posey *et al.* 1984). Proponents of this perspective understand that their practice helps to perpetuate capitalism; however, they hope to achieve the dubious task of humanizing capitalism in the process (Clay 1992; Hammond 1994:1).

In general, then, the convergence of the forces of critique and resistance throughout the 1960s and 1970s, inside and outside of the academy, have rendered the contradictions between the colonizers’ knowledge and that of the colonized increasingly transparent. This process has permitted the former colonized peoples, with some help from anthropologists and other social scientists, to assert the relevance of their knowledge systems. Therefore, now more than ever, applied anthropologists can “mitigate” the embedded contradiction of embracing cultural relativism and simultaneously engaging in projects that “Westernize” and modernize more than they contribute to local autonomy.

### *Conclusion: Implications of the Indigenous Perspective for Applied Anthropology*

One of the universals of culture, it seems, is that each group regards its own knowledge system as *the* “truth.” For the Western powers, this inherent ethnocentrism assumes warrant and hegemony through the seductive power of the technology based on their scientific “superiority.” This has posed a problem for anthropologists, who are enculturated and trained in that scientific perspective and thus share these assumptions of superiority: Their humanist tendencies, supported by an abstract, morally de-centered cultural relativism, have often had to accommodate the perceived historical imperative of industrial capitalism. There is clearly a limit to how far any discipline can go in challenging the taken-for-granted understandings on which its own society is based without undercutting its own viability. Still, many anthropologists feel that the discipline has squandered its opportunity to address Malinowski’s critique of science as dehumanizing and “denaturalizing to nature” (1930:406). More than any other professional group, anthropologists ought to be able to assess the effect of this history, standing as they do between the domains of the indigenous and the “West.” Anthropologists, therefore, must choose between being facilitators for local autonomy (*as per* ILO Convention 169) by brokering the preservation and application of knowledge systems that contribute to re-humanization and re-naturalization of nature—to borrow Malinowski’s idea—as the indigenous perspective demands, or be agents of hegemonic “progress” (Escobar 1991:671-72; 1995; Johannsen 1992). We must recognize, however, that brokering the application of indigenous knowledge presents innumerable difficulties: differential class and community interests; contested interpretations of knowledge; inability of particular knowledge domains to address specific problems; communicational difficulties; duration of research allowed by development agencies; unpredictability of outcome; and ethical dilemmas (see Sillitoe 1998).

Placing indigenous knowledge and Western (scientific) knowledge on a comparative analytic plane has a number of important implications for this brokering process. First, it locates the historical struggle between the cultural rights of indigenous peoples and the dictates of positivist-inclined science within academic discourse as a political and ethical issue. The schism between indigenous knowledge and "Western" knowledge has been treated by some anthropologists as an empirical methodological issue in development (Brokensha *et al.* 1980; Reed and Behrens 1989). The contemporary discourse, however, shows it to be far more than that (Fahim 1982). It is ideological, it is ethical, and it is epistemological. Once these dimensions are made explicit, we can begin to bridge the gap between methodology and ideology by showing the hidden interdependence that has existed all along.

The second implication is that the epistemological parity of both knowledge systems underscores the recognition by many anthropologists (Escobar 1995; Gilliam 1991; Gordon 1991; Harrison 1991; Marcus and Fischer 1986) that anthropology is not simply cultural study but also, and equally important, cultural critique and transformation.

Third, this perspective forces us to confront the question of what is considered relevant knowledge for long-term survival in the face of entrenched hegemonic relations and global ecological threat. Social scientists have a moral responsibility to engage the question of what is efficacious knowledge given the needs of a particular historical moment. By thus applying the term *knowledge*, scholars are inserting culture/knowledge into the contemporary discourse as a component of power relations, beyond the notion of cultural division of labor, beyond race, and beyond ethnicity. Knowledge is a contested resource (Bourdieu 1977; Fardon 1985), and one key insight of postmodern thinking is that the definition of a cultural understanding as knowledge is a political act.

Fourth, there is a methodological implication which logically derives from the above implications: we are forced to pay greater attention to the emic, not just with respect to research but most certainly with respect to implementation. Hence, more anthropological studies must necessarily be done by indigenous/local peoples themselves, or otherwise be fully collaborative efforts. This is true for applied anthropology, inside as well as outside the industrial West. In the US, for example, there is an increasing amount of short contract work being done by US anthropologists, and more and more "native" anthropologists are being employed by US corporations (Fiske and Chambers 1996). Yet, in these circumstances, as well as in short contract work overseas, the nature of research has moved in a direction away from the long-term, participant observation method which is the only proven method for researching *bonafide* emic knowledge. Applied anthropology is therefore threatened by the diminution of an area fundamental to the discipline, the study of emic knowledge. One way to avoid or mitigate this threat is to employ native anthropologists who already possess emic knowledge but who, by reason of training, can mitigate "insider" subjectivity. This will, by necessity, involve being co-opted to some degree. However, it is a compromise more acceptable than leaving all research in the hands of outsiders, and consciousness of the inevitability of co-opting can lead to the forging of mitigating measures.

Finally, if I am correct in arguing that the increasing importance of indigenous knowledge has a basis in the humanist

historical tendencies of applied anthropology, then it seems a logical move for applied anthropology — indeed all of anthropology — to place its tools in the service of greater autonomy for those by whose side we claim to stand. We must recognize, however, that greater autonomy is at its root incompatible with the structure and process of global "development" as we know it.

#### NOTES

<sup>1</sup>It is not my claim that the humanist disaffection with Westernization (and the resultant facilitation of relative autonomy) has been the leading one in applied anthropology. It may or may not have been. My argument is simply that this tendency has been present. For a recent discussion of ideology in applied anthropology, see Bennett 1996 and his references.

<sup>2</sup>This usage of *tribe* has been generally less precise than its usage to refer to a specific form of socio-political unit.

<sup>3</sup>I have purposely avoided defining the "West," being satisfied at this stage to work with a popular understanding: the "West" as more a structural rather than a particular entity.

<sup>4</sup>"Western" in this context refers to peoples constituting the politically dominant populations in what is today known as Europe and North America. It is an ethnic as well as political economic category. This is not a usage which will please many anthropologists, because it combines many cultures with due recognition of their distinctions. From a cultural point of view, however, the focus is on commonalities rather than differences. Perhaps the most culturally significant commonality we might mention here is individualism (Bellah, *et al.* 1985; Dumont 1986). Suffice it to say that this cultural trait has structural ramifications in most "Western" institutions, including politics, economy and social organization.

<sup>5</sup>According to the late Michael Warren (1998:244), use of the term *indigenous knowledge* began with Robert Chamber's group at the Institute of Development Studies, University of Sussex, in 1979. It was used in a technical sense — *Indigenous Technical Knowledge* (ITK) — to distinguish local knowledge relevant to development from Western technical knowledge being used in the same context. The usage therefore places both systems of knowledge on a comparable analytic level (see Brokensha, *et al.* 1980).

<sup>6</sup>While researching informal cooperatives in Jamaica and Trinidad in the summer of 1993, the term *indigenous* was used frequently by locals to refer to informal cooperatives as well as locally-initiated "development" projects.

<sup>7</sup>Admittedly, the definition of *indigenous* (and *indigenous knowledge*) is imprecise enough to cause this writer some discomfort. And the fact that it has become an emic ideological term among indigenous as well as the "folksy" and not so "folksy" NGO groups helps little. It is because of this discomfort that I have opted to use *indigenous perspective* instead of merely *indigenous*. In essence it connotes a self-help, self-definitional process which is informed by local (sometimes native) cultural knowledge.

<sup>8</sup>I do not attempt to define applied anthropology nor to present a history in the true sense of the term. Other scholars covered much of that territory (Bennett 1996; Fiske and Chambers 1996; Polgar 1979). John Bennett's article cited here contains a good set of references treating the history of the sub-field. See also the response to Bennett's article by Alvin Wolfe, pp. S47-S48.

<sup>9</sup>Others have used different divisions or phases in discussing the emergence of applied anthropology. van Willigen, for example, divides the history into four "eras:" the predisciplinary period which ended in 1860; the research/consultant period, 1860 to 1941; the role extension period, 1941 to 1970; and the policy research period, 1970 to present (van Willigen 1991:3-7).

<sup>10</sup>In a limited sense the work on race relations was really a continuation of an earlier trend, the study of ethnic groups in the United States (Szwed 1979).

<sup>11</sup>The ISA operated in Mexico, Peru, Brazil, Columbia and other Latin American countries.

<sup>12</sup>The period did, however, produce Action Anthropology, an engaged, self-consciously ideological humanist approach spearheaded by Sol Tax (Bennett 1996; Tax 1952; 1958; van Willigen 1991:5).

<sup>13</sup>The UN touts UNCED as a broad success, yet Worldwatch Institute's report on *Progress Toward a Sustainable Society* argues that even with substantial progress "the world has so far failed to meet the broader challenge of integrating environmental strategies into economic policy" (Brown, Flavin and French 1997:4). The UN convened the Rio+5 Conference in June 1997 to assess progress made since Rio and to set future direction.

<sup>14</sup>One of the most outstanding of the earlier attempts was by David Brokensha, whose attention to indigenous knowledge systems was prefigured in one of his earliest works in Africa. Kwame Nkrumah had launched the well known Volta River Project in Ghana as prelude to intensive industrialization. The project would have created the largest man-made lake at the time and would have displaced some 67,000 Ghanians. Brokensha, who was teaching at the time in Ghana, observed that no one asked those who would be displaced what they thought of the project. He therefore successfully lobbied the Ghanaian government to allow anthropologists to study the effects on the so-called beneficiaries (Brokensha 1963). Attention to the thought of beneficiaries led to attention to the knowledge of the voiceless. Brokensha's work is representative of the systematic attention not only to indigenous knowledge but to the broader anthropological concern for the relationship of cultural institutions to economic processes (Bohannon 1968; Dalton 1967; Firth 1967; Polanyi 1977; Sahlin 1972; Warren, et al. 1995), and to the importance of not imposing policies from above (Brokensha 1966; Brokensha and Little 1988).

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