Defining Indigeneity

Situating Transnational Knowledge

Manjusha S. Nair
Rutgers University
http://www.rci.rutgers.edu/~manjusha/
manjusha@eden.rutgers.edu

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Abstract

The paper examines the problems associated with the transnational discourse on indigenous peoples. The popularity of the notion of indigenous peoples is primarily due to the transnational networks that give them a common platform of articulation. The civil, political, and cultural rights of indigenous peoples are protected by agencies such as the International Labor Organization, the United Nations Working Group on Indigenous peoples, and the World Council of Indigenous Peoples. Locally, such discourse is reproduced in grass roots environmental activism, local Non Governmental Organizations, and the representatives of the Human Rights Commission. The local exists as the interface between the indigenous populations and the global discourse. My analysis will summarize the characteristics of both the global and local manifestations of the discourse. My attempt is to show the differences in imagining the discourse, determined primarily by the social location of the agents. The transnational discourse, while legitimatizing "indigenous peoples'" struggles, withholds legitimacy from similar struggles that do not explicitly claim indigeneity. In addition, it makes legitimate means of access to wellbeing like citizenship obsolete. This I define as the problem of legitimation. I explore this problem from the empirical context of a post-colonial country. The post-colonial context is specifically chosen to indicate the direction of the hierarchy in the transnational discourse. Post-colonial is used as a descriptive category that signifies independence from colonial rule, the formation of new nation-states, forms of economic development dominated by the growth of indigenous capital and the persistence of the effects of colonization in the decolonized society. The country chosen is India due to my familiarity with the same. My analysis can be extrapolated to countries in the South Asian and South East Asian region due to the homogeneity of the post-colonial condition. I offer the case of Chhattisgarh Mukti Morcha, an Indian movement for political autonomy in middle India (Chhattisgarh region) which illustrates the difficulty of fitting a neat category of indigeneity on a movement that can be also be considered ethno-nationalist and class-based.

1. Introduction

This paper analyzes the power structure that underlies the transnational discourse on 'indigenous peoples.'[1] It poses the puzzle of legitimation, in which the criteria for inclusion in the transnationally accepted categories are fuzzy and uncertain. My prime motive is to depict the structures of domination and subordination that inspire transnationalism, and the power of the latter in imposing the categories of its own understanding. I interrogate the seemingly horizontal and even spread of the transnational resistance to neo-liberalism.

Transnationalism refers to the condition in which networks of relationships are forged transcending pre-existing boundaries of nation-states (see Castells 1996). I particularly refer to the networks of resistance enabled by supranational and transnational organizations that collectively represent popular interest in the neo-liberal epoch. For instance, they are together called 'the broad base of the triangle of global power' if the global power structure is visualized in the form of a pyramid that is composed of progressively broader ties (Hardt and Negri 2001:313) [2]. The networks of resistance offered by transnational organizations are also called the 'global civil society' (Kaldor, Anheier and Glasius 2003) that shields the masses both from repressive governance and tyrannical market.

The popularity of the notion of indigenous peoples is primarily due to the transnational networks that give them a common platform of articulation. In 1994, the United Nations General Assembly launched the International Decade of the World's Indigenous Peoples (1995-2004) to raise the commitment to the 'idea' (Béteille 1998) of indigenous peoples. The civil, political, and cultural rights of indigenous peoples are protected by agencies such as the International Labor Organization, the United Nations Working Group on Indigenous peoples, and the World Council of Indigenous Peoples. For instance, the ILO Convention no. 169 (1989) on Indigenous and Tribal Peoples in Independent Countries decreed that national governments should give back lands that were traditionally occupied by indigenous peoples, and should let them set their own development priorities. Affirming the UN commitment to indigenous peoples, then UN Secretary General Boutros-Ghali reflected: "The unique way of life of indigenous peoples had at last come to be appreciated at its true value. Organizations of indigenous people had been formed. Collective rights in historical homelands were being recognized and land claims pressed with some success" (Boutros-Ghali 1994: 9–13, quoted in Kuper 2003).

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[1] Henceforth 'indigenous peoples' will not appear in quotes, though intended.

[2] The other tiers in the pyramid consists of (in descending order) the countries and organizations that control the monetary and military flow, the transnational corporations, and the sovereign nation-states.

I sum up the entire discussions regarding indigenous peoples at the theoretical and practical level, as the transnational discourse. If the discourse on indigeneity is thought about in the form of a network, one can distinguish the two scales of global and local. The global manifestations of the discourse are the United Nations, International Non Governmental Organizations, and Environmentalist Activists Groups that overlap the other categories. Locally, such discourse is reproduced in grass roots environmental activism, local Non Governmental Organizations, and the representatives of the Human Rights Commission. The local exists as the interface between the indigenous populations and the global discourse. My analysis will summarize the characteristics of both the global and local manifestations of the discourse. My attempt is to show the differences in imagining the discourse, determined primarily by the social location of the agents.

The transnational discourse, while legitimatizing indigenous peoples' struggles, withholds legitimacy from similar struggles that do not explicitly claim indigeneity. In addition, it makes legitimate means of access to wellbeing like citizenship obsolete. This I define as the problem of legitimation. I explore this problem from the empirical context of a post-colonial society. The post-colonial context is specifically chosen to indicate the direction of the hierarchy in the transnational discourse. Post-colonial is used as a descriptive category that signifies independence from colonial rule, the formation of new nation-states, forms of economic development dominated by the growth of indigenous capital and the persistence of the effects of colonization in the decolonized society (Hall 1996: 248). The country chosen is India due to my familiarity with the same. My analysis can be extrapolated to countries in the South Asian and South East Asian region due to the homogeneity of the post-colonial condition (see Murray Li 2000 for the comparable case of Indonesia).

2. The inevitable paradox in the transnational embodiment of indigeneity

The concept of indigenous peoples involves a paradox. Indigenous peoples are distinguished from others based on the preeminence of rights to community ownership. Nevertheless, the notion of rights is modern, based on individual property rights that originated in industrial society. The basic assumption behind individual property rights is the privilege to enclose nature where one has expended labor (emphasized by Locke (1690:22), followed up by classical economists like Adam Smith and Karl Marx). The individual right to enclose nature is diametrically opposed to ownership by community (an argument that is behind eco-feminism, exemplified in Domosh and Seager 2001, Mies and Shiva 1993). Yet, an understanding of legitimate rights over territory by indigenous peoples requires a prior affirmation of private property rights. In other words, there is no uncoupling of primevalness

of indigenous peoples from modern notions of individual property rights. A more general analysis will show that the opposition is not just been individual and collective property rights, but between individualism and collectivism in general. Paradoxically, the recognition of collective property rights originates in the idea of human rights that has the basis in western liberalism and individualism (see Paine 1999 for the link between the conception of indigenous peoples, human rights, and Western liberalism and individualism).

The paradox (that community ownership is a negation of individual ownership; however, granting the rights of community ownership requires the idea of individual property rights) is inevitable because the legitimacy given to the concept of indigenous peoples is inherently linked to Western social and cultural changes since the 1970s. One such change that is of considerable importance to my analysis is the replacement of old forms of class-based protest by new forms of identity-based protests. The new forms of protest "transcend class structure, democratize the dynamic of everyday life and expand the civil versus political dimensions of society, and highlight new or formerly weak dimensions of identity" (Johnston, Larana & Gusfield 1994:7). These new forms of protest present a break with the progressive narrative due to the failure of the former to articulate the common good inclusive of all marginal groups (see Offe 1985, Melucci 1985 and Touraine 1981 for a sociological analysis of new social movements). They on the other hand seek alternatives to market, technology, and repressive elements in the production process. Their focus is on heterogeneity, in contrast to the homogenizing tendencies of modernization. The same has been underlined as the paradox of post-modernity by David Harvey (1990) where there is a celebration of fragmentation ('difference', the particular, etc.) where unification (globalization) becomes the defining power in money, communications (Internet, World Wide Web), and commodified (transnational) culture.

The logic that is behind the new forms of protest is evident in the work of contemporary liberal philosophers like Jürgen Habermas and Etienne Balibar. For instance, Habermas argues that the new form of collective actions is resistance to the tendencies of the 'system mechanisms' (represented by structures like bureaucracy, economy) to 'colonize the life world' (moral and political foundations of a society) (1981: 35). They arise in a non-institutionalized realm of politics, and are concerned with questions of the life world, regarding cultural reproduction, and social integration. "They are not sparked by problems of distribution, but concern the grammar of forms of life" (ibid: 33). Following the logic of telos (or evolution), such agents of change can arise only from the most complex or differentiated of societies. The linkage between the new forms of protest and the notion of indigenous peoples can be directly drawn from the ideas of Habermas. Indigenous forms of life signifies the most simple form of society that is characterized by the non-existence of the 'system mechanisms', the omnipresence of community, networks, shared values and meanings. Thus

supporting the grammar of forms of life becomes affirmation of indigenous peoples as pure and simplified form of life.

The notion of indigenous peoples as a community formed through primordial associations, having a particular relationship with nature and ecology pervade the thinking of the post-industrial Western mind. The logical outcome of such thinking is the paternalistic affirmation of the indigenous space as a pure space not to be trampled upon. For instance, Habermas justifies the struggles of 'aboriginal peoples' as historically justified since "they have been assimilated within a state without their consent" (2001:72), the implication being that aborigines should be let free since they are aborigines. Indigenous communities, which are inherently linked to the process of modernization, are placed outside the sphere of modernization. Indigenous ways of life, art forms, food-habits, industries, all become markers of a traditional world that is free from the perils of modernization. This trend has been captured accurately be Friedman when he argues that "the indigenous is now part of a larger inversion of western cosmology in which the traditional 'other', a modern category, is no longer the starting point of the long and positive evolution of civilization, but a voice of 'wisdom', a way of life in tune with nature, a culture in harmony, a *gemeinschaftt*, that we have all but lost" (Friedman 1999: 2).

3. Reproduction of the discourse in the United Nations: mirroring the paradox

Scholars understand the UN forum as an avenue of expression of indigenous aspiration that has been denied until now (see Chakma 2002, Muehlebach 2001, and Henriksen 1999 among others). For instance, Muehlebach (2001) uses the metaphor of 'place making' to examine how indigenous delegates are involved in the discursive production of 'indigenous place' in the UN. Most often, indigenous identities are understood as a political strategy used by the respective communities, for lack of a better political terrain. For instance, Hodgson (2002) examines the Maasai attempts in Tanzania to link their fragmented identities together in terms of 'indigeneity' that in turn gave them better visibility, increased legitimacy and improved donor support. Murray Li (2000) shows that, in Indonesia, tribal people articulate transnationally recognized indigenous identity as a strategy. She argues that indigenous identities are a contingent product of agency and cultural and political work of articulation. A similar comparison has been made by Parkin (2000) in his study of tribes in central region of India (Jharkhand region).

The history of indigenous peoples in the UN is not as recent as the transnational discourse that articulates it. In 1923, Deskaheh, an Iroquois Chief traveled to Geneva to speak to the League of Nations about his discontentment with the efforts of the Canadian

government to undermine the traditional Confederate Council of the Iroquois community[3]. He spent over a year speaking about the unjust actions of the Canadian government against their former Iroquois allies in World War I. His efforts were largely ignored; he was expelled from Canada; and he died a humble death in New York in 1925. A Deskaheh attempt with the tinge of martyrdom is considered an important event marking the emergence of indigenous struggles. For instance, the history page of the website of UN Permanent Forum of indigenous peoples starts with the biography and photograph of Deskaheh. The attempt to create a hero and martyr who sacrificed his good life for saving the native rights to live in community upon the banks of the Grand River[4] marks the trap in which indigenous peoples are embedded by definition. They have rights; but collective rights determined by their nativity.

The recorded history of indigenous peoples in the UN starts in 1982 with the Working Group on Indigenous peoples established by a decision of the United Nations Economic and Social Council. It completed a draft declaration on the rights of indigenous peoples in 1993. The draft declaration is supposed to usher in collective rights to a degree unprecedented in international human rights law. The latest in the line is the formation of UN Permanent Forum of Indigenous Peoples created in 2001 with a broad mandate to deal with six main areas: economic and social development, culture, the environment, education, health, and human rights.

The category of indigenous peoples that is used by the UN is ahistorical, mirroring the notion of the simple and undifferentiated society in the post-industrial discourse (discussed in the previous section). I examine the UN definition of indigenous peoples and the UN draft declaration to open up the problem of historicity. The UN Working Group on Indigenous Peoples has five criteria to determine an indigenous community (based on Martinez Cobo report of 1986): self-definition, non-dominance, historical continuity with pre-colonial societies, ancestral territories, and ethnic identity (For a detailed description, see Kingsbury 1998, Anaya 1996). The first criterion, self-definition has already made the space of indigeneity a battlefield for inclusion. In that sense, it resembles the representational political field of nation-states where communities that were unheard of before suddenly appear and assume an identity that cries for representation. The second criterion, non-dominance, implies victim hood, which not surprisingly, is what generally defines indigeneity (as vulnerable,

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[3] From the Website of UN Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues. URL: http://www.un.org/esa/socdev/pfii/history.htm, accessed on 02/15/2004.

[4] Grand River Land is a reservation of the Six Nations People who fled to British lands, now Canada, from their lands below the border after the American Revolution. They chose these acres, gratefully guaranteed to them by the British through General Haldimand, because the Grand River, with its level flats, reminded them of their beloved lands taken over by New York State. This information was taken from the following website: http://tuscaroras.com/IDLA/pages/deskaheh.html, accessed on 02/15/2004.

marginalized and the like). The third and fourth criteria lack historical sense. In the swirl of migration and nomadism that has characterized human history; very few societies in the world inhabit ancestral territories. Rather, it could be argued that the creation of territories of belonging is itself a product of colonial practices that forced aboriginal communities to recede into the forests. For instance, in a study of tribes in the Chhattisgarh region in India, Prasad (2003) argues that the tribal people who were peasant cultivators were pushed into the forests by cultivators that are more powerful during the Maratha rule. This process was further accentuated by the British through the permanent settlement of agricultural lands in the region. This ensured that the movement of the tribes between plains and forest stopped forever. The last criterion, ethnic identity, is not a significant marker of indigenous peoples alone.

Let us look at the third and fourth criteria once again:

"Indigenous peoples and nations are those which, having a historical continuity with pre-invasion and pre-colonial societies that developed on their territories, consider themselves distinct from other sectors of societies now prevailing in those territories, or parts of them. They form at present non-dominant sectors of society and are determined to preserve, develop and transmit to future generations their ancestral territories, their ethnic identity, as the basis of their continued existence as peoples, in accordance with their own cultural patterns, social institutions and legal systems" (Martinez Cobo Report, Para 379-80, reprinted in Kingsbury ibid, emphasis added).

These criteria show that the UN conception of indigeneity is linked to territoriality, a primeval quality of defense of territories against others of the same species. The Oxford English Dictionary (second edition, 1989) defines 'indigenity' as the quality of being indigenous, or indigenousness. The term indigenous is defined as born or produced naturally in a land or region; native or belonging naturally to the soil, region, etc. The term is used primarily to denote aboriginal inhabitants or natural products.

Furthermore, the territoriality is premised on originality, since original inhabitants have more claims on a territorial space (which interestingly again is an extension of private property). Hence, indigeneity becomes a field of contestation. Some are born with it; others imagine it as an ethnic belonging. Empirically, the claim of indigeneity is always contested since few human groups inhabit a space from the beginning. The groups that claim indigeneity associate themselves with the original inhabitants in quite imaginative ways though they exist many generations later. For example, many tribes in India use the term Adivasi, which literally means inhabitants of the beginning, to define their identity transcending the definitions of the state (see Hardiman 1987).

The UN Working Group on Indigenous Peoples formulated a draft declaration on the rights of indigenous peoples, the latest version of which is in 1993. The draft declaration affirms the commitment of the UN to end the discrimination against indigenous peoples. The

eleven-page draft[5] is a very productive document to explore the notion of indigenous peoples that dominate transnational thinking. The draft declaration starts with the affirmation of the right to equality and to difference of indigenous peoples. The preamble of the draft declaration reiterates:

"Affirming that indigenous peoples are equal in dignity and rights to all other peoples, while recognizing the right of all peoples to be different, to consider themselves different, and to be respected as such…" (ibid: 1)

The first inference that I drew from studying the draft is that indigenous peoples are conceived as an entity outside the realm of state and hence outside citizenship rights that defines individuals of a state. The Preamble states that the draft declaration recognizes 'that indigenous peoples have the right freely to determine their relationships with States in a spirit of coexistence, mutual benefit and full respect (ibid: 2). Explicit references to distinctness indicate exemption from the state and hence exemption from the obligations of citizenship:

"Indigenous peoples have the collective and individual right…., including prevention and redress for: a] Any action which has the aim or effect of depriving them of their integrity as distinct peoples, or of their cultural values or ethnic identities; b] Any form of assimilation or integration by other cultures or ways of life imposed on them by legislative, administrative or other measures" (Article 7) (Emphasis added).

Secondly, while the conceptions of rights are an extension of the rights of a citizen in a nation, such individual rights guaranteeing fundamental freedoms and security figure only occasionally. Such discussions, when they appear, are not based on cultural difference, but on augmenting socio-economic welfare. For instance, Article 22 affirms special rights "in the areas of employment, vocational training and retraining, housing, sanitation, health and social security..." Article 18 states the rights of indigenous peoples to fully enjoy the rights established under international law and national labor legislation. It can be concluded that the socio-economic exploitation is taken care of by individual rights while cultural discrimination is taken care of by collective rights.

A closer examination showed that the collective rights are defined both based on the natural (needs and interests) and cultural differences. Though the draft condemns all kinds of racism (Preamble, third paragraph), there is a slippage in affirming indigenous people's right to development in accordance with their 'needs' (occurs twice in the Preamble, in paragraph five and eight). All other rights are based on the distinctiveness of indigenous peoples. For instance, Article 6 states that "Indigenous peoples have the collective right to live in freedom, peace, and security as distinct peoples…" and Article 32 affirms "Indigenous peoples have

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5 The eleven-page declaration is available on a number of internet websites. I used the copy from the Human Rights Library of the University of Minnesota. I cross checked it with other web pages for accuracy. URL: http:// www1.umn/humanrts/instree/declra.htm, accessed on 03/05/2004.

the collective right to determine their own citizenship in accordance with their customs and tradition".

Finally, the protection of the otherness of indigenous peoples, defined by their distinct cultural traits is upon the United Nations. Article 40 and 41 envision the image of UN in fully realizing the provisions of the draft declaration. Article 40 says:

"The organs and specialized agencies of the United Nations system and other intergovernmental organizations shall contribute to the full realization of the provisions of this Declaration through the mobilization, inter alia, of financial cooperation and technical assistance".

Article 40 continues with a very fruitful clue:

"Ways and means of ensuring participation of indigenous peoples on issues affecting them shall be established".

The UN discourse on indigenous peoples reiterates the vulnerability of the latter as a community, unable to establish itself due to centuries old marginalization. The paradox of the UN discourse is that it attempts to empower the marginalized; however, they have to be relegated to the position of victims to be empowered. This illuminates the powerless subject-hood that entraps the indigenous communities, even when they adopt it as a political strategy.

4. Divergence in the local production of the discourse

In this section, I advance the argument that instead of blindly adapting the discourse on indigenous peoples, the local agents of transnationalism reshape it to fit the local categories of knowledge. I examine the case of India to elucidate my argument. Specifically, I argue that the discourse of the local agencies attempts to recapture the decolonized spaces of the Indian nation. Hence, many of their ideas are nationalistic, diverging from the basic tenet of transnationalism, of transcending the boundaries of the nation-state.

The discourse related to tribal people[6] first figured in India on the eve of independence from the colonial rule. The question was raised whether to integrate the tribes to the nation or to leave them as they are. This integrationist- isolationist debate was furiously pursued by Verrier Elwin, a British missionary turned anthropologist, and G. S. Ghurye, an Indian sociologist (see Guha 1999 for details). Elwin passionately defended the culture of the tribal people of India, against the corrosive influences of Hindu and Christian cultures. He was a fervent supporter of the Indian nationalist movement, but eventually tried to defend the tribal

[6] The question whether tribal people represent the global category of indigenous peoples is a tricky one and is dealt with in detail in the following two sections. Here I use them synonymously since they appear so in the discourse.

people from a homogenizing nationalism. On the other hand, G S Ghurye, founder of the Indian sociological society, considered tribal people as 'imperfectly integrated' or 'backward Hindus' and argued for the integration of tribal people to the mainstream. Evidence shows that the Indian government followed the latter as a paternalistic administrative strategy towards tribal people (see Corbridge 2003). Elwin can be considered a precursor of the contemporary discourse on indigenous peoples in India, as is evident from the renewed interest in him and his work (for instance see Guha 1999, Prasad 2003).

Mahatma Gandhi, the mass leader of the Indian nationalist struggle for independence, was ambivalent in his approach to tribal people. Nevertheless, many Gandhian movements arose that attempted to bring tribal people into the mainstream of the nation. One such movement was the *Sarvodaya*[7] movement that started in the 1950s, which aimed to incorporate the rural (peasant and tribal) population into the immanent nation by reforming their ways of lives and practices. The *Sarvodaya* leader, Sunderlal Bahuguna, started an early environmentalist movement in India, called the Chipko movement, in the Tehri region of Uttar Pradesh. The purpose of the Chipko movement was to protest against the commercialization of forestry through hugging trees (hence, the name Chipko that means 'to hug') (see Guha 2002 for a history of Chipko movement). This movement contributed to the association of the peasants, tribal people, and women with the preservation of ecology. It also marked the trend for environmentalism based on non-violent struggle (which was transcribed back into the transnational struggles).

Many of the contemporary environmentalist groups in India gain moral support from the Chipko movement. The most prominent among them are the Save Narmada Campaign and the eco-feminist movement by Vandana Shiva. The direct emphasis of these movements is on of the deleterious impact of modernization that was launched in India in the event of Independence. The Indian modernization program that emphasized on building heavy industry like iron and steel (metaphorically related to building the muscles of the masculine nation) led to the displacement of forests and natural resources, along with the communities that were associated with them. Hence, there is a coupling of the local discourse on indigenous people with the environmentalist discourse.

The local discourse uses the rhetoric of anti-colonialism. For instance, environmentalist Vandana Shiva's opposition to modernization is based on the femininity of indigenous cultures, and valorization of feminine power (1999). Shiva's analysis focuses around how the reductionist, masuclinist heritage of colonial forestry displaced the survival strategies of the peasantry, the equilibrium of which was the subsistence activities of women. The objective of eco-feminist activism, then, is to reclaim the logic of the 'feminine life giving' principle along

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[7] Literally, *Sarvodaya* means "sunrise for everyone". Figuratively it denotes "awakening".

with an organic recovery of nature (1999: 67). For Shiva, globalization exists as a continuation of colonialism (neocolonialism), as a more serious form of appropriation of the right to survival in the third world.

The discourse is always centered on the recapture of spaces that are displaced in the process of modernization. These spaces are defined not as belonging to the indigenous peoples alone, but which is the 'true' expression of the nation of India. For instance, environmentalism in India does not involve a discontinuity in the narration of the nation. Environmentalism is critical of the policies of the nation-state, as inscribed in the modernization process. On the other hand, environmental movements still believe in the goodness of the nation as a secular, humanitarian institution, which has the power to defend the citizens against the vagaries of globalization. For instance, Shiva states that state is a patriarchal, yet protective parent for citizens of India in the global market place, which ensures the universal right to land and universal right to food (Shiva 1993). It is based on the ideal of the nation as a collectivity that peasants and tribal people are organized. It has an alternative trajectory of development that is indigenous, subjective, and rejection of the condescension of the West. Hence, there is the persistence of the national narrative.

5. Disjuncture: the problem of legitimation

The universal category of indigenous peoples entails certain disjunctures from the empirical perspective of a post-colonial society like India. I summarize these disjunctures as the problem of legitimation.

First, the post-colonial nation-state itself was imagined and formed based on indigenous claims to a geographical territory. Hence struggles by indigenous peoples seem to the post-colonial mind like a creation in its own image. The rhetoric of anti-colonial nationalisms in the 19th and 20th century is rife with ideas of the motherland to be saved from outsiders (for example the concept of *Bharat Mata* or Mother India). This geographical belonging to a territory is an essential component of any kind of nationalism according to Smith (1986) which he terms the (unavoidable) ethnic core of nations. Theories of internal colonization have been used to describe the subjection of indigenous peoples. For example, the uneven regional development of post-colonial India has been explained based on a two-nation theory, the coexistence of exploiting and exploited nations within the nation of India (Roy 2003 (1982)). Thus, indigenous struggles appear as a repetitive nationalism, often questioning the sanctity of post-colonial nationalist claims.

Second, current politics in post-colonial countries is rife with ethno-nationalisms and communalisms that are of a similar vein to indigenous movements. Though indigenous peoples and ethnic communities are placed in opposition in many cases as insiders and

immigrants, their histories are interwoven in two directions. Both narrate a story of forced eviction from homelands. For the former, it was displacement from economic and social belonging, while for the latter, it was through dislocation, both social and cultural necessitated by immigration. Furthermore, in many instances, as in the case of Assamese nationalism in India (see Baruah 1999) ethno-nationalisms emerge in the context of immigration as movements to fight economic and social displacement. It becomes difficult to differentiate ethno-nationalisms from indigenous movements in such cases.

The question of communalism is also closely linked. In principle, communalisms are associated with territoriality and creation of insiders and outsiders. Claims of indigeneity also echo in communalism or Hindu nationalism in contemporary India. It is interesting to see how the governing body itself seeks its legitimacy by reiterating claims to originality. The states' attempts to install pro-right-wing historians in the Indian Council for Historical Research is driven by the necessity of a new history in which Aryans can be shown in a better light than as invaders from Central Asia who destroyed indigenous cultures. Equally significant are the archaeological attempts to excavate remains of Hindu temples from the sites of mosques as in the case of Ayodhya. What predominates is a conviction in the rights based on originality. It is difficult to distinguish communalist claims from indigenous or ethnic claims based on territoriality.

Third, the idea of indigenous peoples emerged in the Americas, Australia, and New Zealand, where there is a direct contrast between Western colonizers and the natives. For instance, in an attempt to counter Béteille's critique of the idea of indigenous people, Brown (1998) refers to the origin of the term as an instrument of 'identity and power' in the Americas in the 18th and 19th centuries:

> "One thinks of the North American 18th and 19th century examples such as the strategic efforts by leaders including Joseph Brant (Mohawk), Tecumseh (Shawnee), Pontiac (Ottawa), Wild Cat and John Horse (Seminole/black Seminole), and Gerónimo (Apache) to create broad alliances of diverse native peoples, some stretching from gulf of Mexico to southern Canada" (1998: 211).

Initially the participants in the Working Group on indigenous peoples in 1985 were predominantly from the North Americas and Australia, with some attendance from Central and South America (Barnes 1995). In such countries, there is no intermediary in the form of an indigenous nation-state. Definitely there was subjection to colonial sovereignty, but it was not dictated on such racist terms as in Asia and Africa. Though it can be argued that the post-colonial moment is the same for all the cases, the nature of the moment is not the same for all countries. Hence a definition of an indigenous community based on nativity is irrational for a post-colonial country like India.

6. Ambivalent subjectivities: who is indigenous?

In this section, I offer the case of Chhattisgarh Mukti Morcha (CMM henceforth), an Indian movement for political autonomy in middle India (Chhattisgarh region). The case is an empirical follow-up of the problem of legitimation, the difficulty of fitting a neat category of indigeneity on a movement that can be also be considered ethno-nationalist and class-based.

Chhattisgarh as a site of industrial transformation has been marked by the continuous displacement of the indigenous community, a permanent feature of state-instituted development processes all over the world. After independence, the new nation-state of India invested heavily on industries like iron and steel to realize the 'Nehruvian dream' of modernization. The Chhattisgarh region, rich in mineral resources such as iron-ore and bauxite, has seven huge public sector undertakings with supporting industries, and iron-ore and coalmines that feed the former. One of the first public sector steel plants in India, the Bhilai Steel Plant, started functioning in 1959 in the Durg district of Chhattisgarh. One of the objectives of the industrialization project in India was to provide employment to the citizens of the newly constituted nation. However, of the total workforce in the entire industrial belt surrounding Bhilai, the proportion of permanent workers to contract and casual workers ranged between 6 to 8 percent. This proportion has been declining since industrial policies started changing as part of the economic restructuring program launched in 1991, leading to the casualization of workers in Bhilai (Jha 1998).

The construction of the plant, the mines and the industrial estate in Bhilai, required the evacuation of ninety-six villages in the 1950s by the Government of India. In return, the villagers were promised employment in the industrial belt. The offer of employment did not materialize due to lack of education, technical aptitude, and lack of skills of the indigenous community. For instance, in the Dalli-Rajhara iron-ore mines, which equip the Bhilai Steel Plant, workers of the mechanized part are primarily internal migrants, whereas the workers of the manual mines are predominantly women, landless laborers, and tribal people of Chhattisgarhi origin (see Parry 1999, Sen 1990). The distinction between the people of Chhattisgarh and that of internal migrants is symbolized in ordinary practice as the railway line that separates the industrial slums from the city of Bhilai. However, indigeneity does not engulf all inhabitants of Chhattisgarh in a similar manner. Many land-owning groups within the indigenous community are owners of small industries in Bhilai and are part of the skilled working class. Furthermore, the unskilled workers include migrant laborers from the neighboring states of Orissa and Andhra Pradesh.

CMM emerged as a mineworker's trade union in the mining towns of Dalli-Rajhara in 1977, inspired by the glaring disparities in the working condition and wages of different types of workers. The movement was a revolt against the traditional trade unions, which did not represent the manual workers. Under the charismatic leadership of Sankar Guha Niyogi, a

Bengali youth who became a legendary figure in popular discourse after his murder in 1991[8], the movement attracted casual and contract workers, indigenous and otherwise, in the Bhilai industrial belt and the neighboring regions in Chhattisgarh. Recognizing the ways in which ethnicity is deployed in the industry, CMM broadened into a movement for the political autonomy of Chhattisgarh in 1982. Since then, the movement has incorporated the concerns of workers, peasants, and the tribal population of Chhattisgarh.

CMM is not involved in the formation of the new federal state of Chhattisgarh in 2000. The latter, the movement claims, is mediated by the rich landowners and industrialists of the region. However, being an officially recognized regional political party in India, it participates in democratic processes like state elections and co-operates with state efforts on tribal development. The movement stresses on non-violent constructive struggles (*Sangarsh aur Nirman*), hence supports women's unions, environmentally viable alternatives in agriculture, and investments in medical care and schooling. CMM has built supportive relations with similar movements in India such as Save Narmada Campaign in Gujarat and Bonded Labor Liberation Front in New Delhi. It actively participates in anti-globalization movements, and has an alternative plan for industrialization with increased labor participation and reduced foreign investment. The movement rejects foreign funds and creates its own funds through workers' contributions. Such activities have helped the creation of an image of CMM as a vibrant civil society that is gathering resources in its fights against the repressive state (Chandhoke 2003).

CMM mobilizes people in three specific ways. First, the movement relies on strategies of horizontal mobilization, a non-hierarchical coming together of people (Guha 1985). Second is the communitarian character of the participants, which is derived both from the rural origins of the participants and from their history of existing in the margins. Third, the movement offers the idea of a nation of Chhattisgarh as something desirable, inclusive, and hence liberatory. I understand the 'horizontal' mobilization of diverse populations within CMM as the emergence of a 'community' (Chatterjee 1993: 224-7), which is based on the idioms of kinship and love, as a form of postcolonial politics to resist the state-mediated world -historic processes of modernization and industrialization. This form of politics refers to the decentralized and egalitarian tribal past to organize the present in a decentralized way as a continuum of the past.

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[8] Niyogi was shot dead by a hired assassin on September 28, 1991. After repeated demands by CMM, the case was handed over to the Central Bureau of Investigation, a semi-autonomous government agency for criminal investigation. Though CBI implicated the owners of the Simplex group of industries in the murder, the Madhya Pradesh State High Court acquitted all accused for lack of evidence. The case is pending final decision in the Supreme Court of India (see Chandhoke 2003).

The movement gets its legitimation through the creation of a history of its past. To give an example from preliminary observations, one of the martyrs invented by the movement is Vir Narayan Singh, a tribal chief of Sonakhan village in Rajnandgaon district who rebelled against the British in 1856. This incident is usually considered in historical writings as part of the tribal rebellions that arose as a resistance to the socio-economic policies of the colonial state (See Singh 2002). CMM made this tribal history an integral part of Chhattisgarh. Vir Narayan Singh became a freedom fighter, his struggle part of the freedom struggle, and he, the first martyr of Chhattisgarh, whose principles and ideals are followed by the people of Chhattisgarh. The martyrdom of CMM members including that of the slain leader Sankar Guha Niyogi in various direct and indirect encounters with the ruling state is understood as a continuum of the sacrifices, which defines the history of Chhattisgarh as a nation.

Studies have shown how the Chhattisgarhi identity builds on tribal history, myths, and religious symbolisms (Dube 1998, Flueckiger 1996, and Babb 1975). In rural Chhattisgarh, the majority of people are mainly from peasant communities like Kurmi and Yadav. Tribal identity becomes the point of reference for the movement even though tribal population comprises only 35% of the total population of the region. The tribal population itself belongs to different tribes such as Halba, Gond, and Oraon; it includes hill tribes (mainly people who dwell on forests) and tribes inhabiting the plains (people who engage in cultivation). The creation of a unified tribal past and the martyrdom of a tribal hero are ways in which the movement incorporates the liberatory and inclusive vision of Chhattisgarh.

In addition, Chhattisgarhi identity is legitimized in the rhetoric that pervades ordinary conversations, speeches, folk tales, slogans, poems, myths, and legends. CMM organizes religious functions in which the legitimacy of the movement is ingrained in the participants. For instance, the movement organizes Dusshera (a religious celebration of the killing of the ten headed Demon king Ravana by the God king Rama) in which the ten industrialists who are the sworn enemies of the movement are substituted for the heads of Ravana. There are ballets and dance dramas depicting the story of the martyr Vir Narayan Singh. The celebration of different martyrs' days (on July 1st and September 28th), slogans that appear everywhere, use of certain ways of greeting (*Lal Johar*), use of red liquor tea, and eating in plates made of leaves hint at the ways in which a certain rhetoric is legitimized through every day practice. Other than looking at them as primordial sentiments of peasant societies, they should be seen as the powerful ways in which social and personal becomes living the present of a nation.

From preliminary observations, I deduce that the new state does not involve the CMM inspired vision of autonomous Chhattisgarh. In the pamphlets published by CMM (Sadgopal 1993: 68) a Chhattisgarhi person is defined as someone who lives and works in the geographic region of Chhattisgarh, with the exclusion of land-owning class, money-lenders and revenue-collectors (*Samantvadi, Sahukar* and *Malguzar*) and contractors, middlemen, and bureaucrats (*Tekedar, Dalal* and *Naukarshaah)*. The government of the new federal state of

Chhattisgarh pinpoints on progress, with focus on industrial parks, mining, power plants, and tourism[9]. In ordinary conversations, the new state emerges as an alliance of similar minded people for a greater share in the pie of resource rich Chhattisgarh.

The snap shot of CMM provided above refutes the conventional idea of an indigenous movement. The participants in this movement are indigenous to a certain extent; however also include migrants to the region. Furthermore, tribal people are only a small proportion of the movement; others are non-tribal cultivating peasants and industrial workers. Following the significance of industrial work, trade union activism is an integral part of CMM. CMM offers a new and less studied form of politics in the postcolonial context in which indigenous, ethnic and class identities merge.

8. Conclusions

Scholars, who have expressed concerns about disjunctures in the concept of indigenous peoples, consider such disjunctures as just practical problems, not doubting the theoretical accuracy of the concept. For example, noted anthropologist André Béteille points out that the Indian state is already struggling with translating the original anthropological notion of tribe into political practice (Béteille 1998). As many anthropological studies have shown, the distinction between tribes and peasants is very thin (see Bailey 1960). In this situation, Béteille claims that it is even more confusing to reframe tribal people as indigenous peoples. However, Béteille affirms the 'political correctness' of the idea though it is challenged by 'practical wisdom' (1998: 191). He comes very close to the big problem that is at the root of this definition, but withdraws arming the transnational discourse with moral power. The distinction between ethical power and practical wisdom that smudge viable political solutions to the problems of indigenous communities in India are discussed by others as well. However, such discussions do not recognize the power of the transnational discourse that shapes it. For instance, in an exploration into the implementation problems of the idea of indigenous peoples in India, Karlsson comments, "the global discourse on indigenousness apparently resonates with or captures central features of tribal predicaments and aspirations" (2001:36).

In contrast, this paper argues that the disjunctures exist within the conception of indigenous peoples within the transnational discourse. The primary disjuncture is the paradox that while community ownership is a prime marker of indigenous rights, granting the rights of community ownership requires the idea of individual property rights. This paradox is inevitable because the legitimacy of the discourse is linked to post-industrial changes in

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[9] Source: http://chhattisgarh.nic.in/, the official website of the Chhattisgarh state government, accessed on 02/15/2004.

Western societies since the 1970s. The category of indigenous peoples that is used by UN is ahistorical, mirroring the notion of the simple and undifferentiated society in the post-industrial discourse. Instead of blindly adapting the transnational discourse on indigenous peoples, the local agents of transnationalism reshape it to fit the local categories of knowledge. Nevertheless, the ahistoricity of the concept remains despite the locality of the discourse. Such an ahistorical category entails a predicament from the empirical perspective of a post-colonial country like India. This I explained as the problem of legitimation. The case of CMM reveals this predicament, the difficulty of fitting a neat category of indigenous identity on a movement that has multiple identities.

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