The Commons We Want

A Review of Selected Social Anthropology Literature for the XIX Biennial Conference of the International Association for the Study of the Commons in Nairobi, June 19-24, 2023

Subtheme 3: Commons, Indigenous Peoples and Globalization

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Introduction

Decolonial studies emphasize the need to challenge and overcome the dominance of Eurocentric knowledge systems and restore Indigenous epistemologies. Colonialism has shaped the fundamental principles of capitalist modernity and created the *other*. It is within these powerful forces that the emergence of *indigeneity* as a political category must be located. The International Labour Organization (ILO) Convention No. 169 takes a practical approach to defining indigenous peoples, referring to subjective criteria (self-identification) and objective criteria, the latter of which denotes "decedents from populations, who inhabited the country or geographical region at the time of conquest, colonisation or establishment of present state boundaries" (Article 1 of the ILO convention). The Convention furthermore states that indigenous peoples "retain some or all of their own social, economic, cultural and political institutions, irrespective of their legal status" (ibid.). The Convention uses inclusive terminology and speaks of indigenous and tribal peoples, granting both groups the same rights. Although we recognize the intersecting contexts and challenges of indigenous and tribal communities, we cannot, within the scope of this report, address the specific issues that affect tribal peoples.

Main debates:

The concept of the commons is of great importance to indigenous communities, for it reflects their traditional practices and values, as well as their cultural heritage in general. Moreover, the concept of the commons supports communities' right to self-determination and land stewardship and creates opportunities for sustainable resource management within indigenous communities.

In this paper, we present literature from social anthropology that focuses on commons in indigenous contexts. The examples paint a rich picture of settings in which collaborative management is practiced by highlighting both the experiences of individuals and the collective perception. The examination of context-specific situations creates depth of content and reveals particular achievements and challenges.

In the following, we will first problematize the hegemony of modern Western ontological assumptions and discuss strategies in social anthropology to represent the diversity of *1) Ontologies* amongst Indigenous Peoples. Indigenous worldviews emphasize interconnectedness and the interdependence of all living beings. Oftentimes Indigenous Peoples view themselves as part of a larger ecological system, where the well-being of the land and more-than-human world directly impacts their own well-being (Miller, 2019). Indigenous Peoples approach their resources in unique ways. The extraction of raw materials from natural environments is often preceded by processes involving negotiations and agreements with non-human entities. However, these customary practices can often not be followed today due to the long enduring colonial control and submission as well as land grabbing and culture shaming, which made of local people indigenous peoples (Bodley 2014). The enduring relationships of indigenous communities to the lands they inhabit and their ancestral and spirit connections have been disrupted or erased in countless instances and myriad forms by colonialism, and subsequent regimes of extractive capitalism.

The commons can serve as a repository of indigenous cultural heritage. In Part 2 on *Local Knowledge and Practices*, we illuminate the embeddedness of cultural practices such as traditional ceremonies and rituals in the territories of Indigenous communities. Communal ownership models can provide physical and spiritual connection to the land, enabling the preservation and transmission of traditional knowledge, Indigenous languages, and cultural traditions. By safeguarding the commons, indigenous communities maintain a dynamic relationship with their land and resources, which in return allows them to uphold the continuity of their way of life and cultural identity. The studies we refer to examine the ways indigenous groups continue to use resources communally and how these can be brought into an already interconnected global system where these practices and knowledge and interests may be in conflict with dominant administrations for the benefit of a powerful few such as governments, NGOs, corporations, businesses or individuals. Insights from case studies shed light on the different interests and consequences of such conflicts.

Part *3) Clashes* targets questions of control over land resources and extractive industries located in Indigenous territories. Many indigenous communities have experienced historical injustices (see also

National and local administrations build on multiple layers of rules and regulations dating from colonial and post-colonial times. Heterogeneity is further exacerbated by the appearance of foreign donors and development interventions (Bierschenk, 2014). To this day, indigenous Peoples around the world are affected by displacement, dispossession, land enclosure, as well as land degradation, and pollution due to infrastructure development projects, large-scale farming, mining activities, and nature conservation programs (see also Niederberger et al 2016, Haller and Weissman 2023). In addition, indigenous peoples make up a large segment of frontline communities, the portion of the population that is feeling the most immediate and severe impacts of the climate crisis.

By reclaiming and defending control over the commons, indigenous communities regain a measure of decision-making power. As such indigenous communities stand up for their rights to land, territories, and resources, which have been recognized in international human rights instruments such as the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP). Indigenous communities have often demonstrated sustainable practices in their management of land and ecosystems and their contributions to conservation have been recognized by the Conference of the Parties (COP) to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) and are increasingly implemented in climate-action plans. Up to 80 percent of the planet's biodiversity, including most of the world's forests, is found on lands inhabited and managed by Indigenous Peoples. Proven strategies for resource conservation, regeneration, and preservation that prioritize long-term sustainability over short-term individual gain are found in many communal ownership models of indigenous communities. Decolonial policies create spaces for the restoration and valorisation of communal property models where traditional practices have been suppressed, ousted, or overridden by the profit-driven logic of colonialism.

If indigenous groups are offered a voice that allows them to position their interests and position on resource management in a global, networked framework, new types of regulations and inclusive policies must be created. The question of how Indigenous worldviews can gain more influence in the creation of new legal frameworks at the regional and national levels is a recurring one. Social anthropology has contributed to this debate by addressing the problem of *voice* and highlighting the challenges of representing the perspectives, experiences, and the agency of individuals and groups within contexts that are shaped by power imbalances, cultural biases and the dominance of Western knowledge systems. The last section of this review *5) What now? Who is we?*, thus introduces some inputs and comments on this regard.

Indigenous peoples and ontologies:

This literature deals with processes of othering and multispecies ethnography which give important insights in different environmental conceptualisations discussed in the literature.

Othering

Haitian-american anthropologist Michel-Rolph Trouillot extensively explored the dynamics of power, representation, and the production of historical narratives that often exclude and silence certain groups, particularly indigenous peoples and colonized populations. He highlights how dominant actors in society have constructed and shaped the writing of history and created the *Other*. During the onset of the colonization of the Americas in the 16th century the West's vision of order was defined by two complementary places a *Here* and a *There*, which stood in great contrast to the geographic imagination of other great powers in history and the present (Trouillot 2003: 21). Trouillot describes how the *Savage* and *utopias*, have been created as an amalgam of fiction and through para-ethnographic descriptions in travel accounts (Ibid.: 14). *Savages* and *utopias* where confined to a space "elsewhere", living and thriving in a state of nature which in its essence was regarded as an ideal state. Until the 19th century the *Savage* and *utopias* remained in a deeply connected field of thought before they got artificially separated (Ibid.: 17). Trouillot's account reveals early processes that advanced a Western worldview based on dualism and separation and underlines their direct link to colonialism. Similarly, Edward Saïd

emphasized that the process of *othering* the "Orient" served to justify Western dominance, expansion, and control over Eastern territories. By portraying the East as inferior and in need of Western intervention, colonization, and influence, the West exercised its power and maintained its control over the "Orient". Dominant Eurocentric perspectives have shaped the conception of modernity as a universal, linear, and progressive path deeply rooted in Western thought and the experience of history. In this view societies are expected to evolve in a linear fashion from 'primitive' to more 'advanced'. This linear understanding of time and 'progress' is highly disputable, as it can lead to a disregard for Indigenous or non-Western ways of life and knowledge. Indigenous ontologies often emphasize relationality, connectedness, and responsibility to the natural world, and offer alternative visions of modernity that challenge the dominant paradigm.

Related to this view is the work of Philip Descola (2013) who distinguishes between the western view of the being in a separation of nature and culture as 'naturalist' ontology and three other ontologies (animism, totemism and analogism) which have distinctive features but have in commons that they do not include the nature culture divide but see all living being having souls and being in interaction with them (animism), being even kinship wise related to them (totemism) or in relation with a higher being (analogism). These three ontologies often found among indigenous communities, however have lower power as the western based capitalist oriented so called 'naturalist' ontology, which also includes the notion of terra nullius (see subtheme 4 on colonial legacies) leading to ontological conflicts.

Ontological conflicts gain an unprecedented visibility as a result of the contesting of the legitimacy of the "hegemony of modern ontological assumptions" (Blaser 2013: 547). The fundamental assumptions of the modern story are put into question: "the internal great divide (nature/culture), the external great divide (modern/nonmodern), and linear progressive time" (ibid.: 555). Based on his research on development and/or conservation projects on the territories of Indigenous communities in Paraguay and Labrador, Mario Blaser has identified different understandings of the different realities that condition resources. A conflict over a ban on caribou hunting, for example, which for the state presents itself as a matter of regulating an animal population, is perceived differently by Indigenous peoples because the animal might be involved in spiritual relationships. Framing such conflicts as "clashes of cultural perspectives" leads to a hierarchization between 'cultural perspectives', of which local perspectives are often perceived as 'more cultural' than those upheld by science (Memorial University). Henceforth, Blaser introduces the analytical framework of *political ontology*, which seeks to explore the converging realities that give rise to conflicts over resources while emphasizing the need to find solutions to resolve these conflicts without colonial imposition. Blaser's concept of *political ontology* invites a critical examination of the assumptions and biases inherent in Western ontologies and emphasizes the need to acknowledge and engage with diverse ontological perspectives in order to address pressing social and environmental challenges in more equitable and sustainable ways.

Multispecies ethnography

Recent endeavours in multispecies ethnography which can be attributed to the ontological turn in social anthropology establish new ways to think about human relationships with their more-than-human environment. Although we cannot delve into the beginnings of multispecies ethnography and discuss its earlier proponents in this review, we would like to highlight individual authors and strands of thought that appear to be promising pathways for the representation and study of Indigenous ontologies. Multispecies ethnography has therefore proven to be an interesting framework for studying community ownership models of Indigenous communities.

Multispecies ethnography displays a high degree of interest in the sensory and advocates for transdisciplinary research methods. Natasha Fijn's and Muhammad A. Kavesh's examination of multisensory perspectives of anthropological ventures into more-than-human worlds presents cases where ethnography alone was "not enough" (Fijn and Kavesh, 2020: 8) and anthropologists have combined methodological techniques from other disciplines to integrate the more-than-human in understanding intertwined social, ecological, and political processes (ibid.: 7). One example discussed by Fijn and Kavesh is a study by Piers Locke and Paul Keil (2015) on human-elephant relatedness in Nepal and India, where they have combined methodological techniques derived from zoology, anthropology and geography. Developments in anthropological thought in the areas of sensuous

scholarship can "offer a way of of misplaced essentialism, which demands strict adherence to what does or does not count as biodiversity, knowledge, and memory" (Nazarea, 2006: 319). The understanding of what Fijn and Kavesh call "a sensory multispecies anthropology", "fuses the intelligible with the sensible by examining vision, sound, smell, touch and taste in a more-than-human world" (ibid.: 13). Some of these studies seek to record how a deep sensuous understanding of other-than-human-bodies is being generated – for example through birdkeeper's habit to interpret their animal's well-being by touching it, smelling its coop, and listening to its sounds (ibid.: 14) as shown in Muhammad Kavesh's work with rural Pakistani pigeon flyers and cockfighters. According to Kavesh, studying the sensory entanglements of the birdkeepers assists in "understanding why people indulge in their chosen practices, structure their daily routines around their birds, and gain symbolic rewards for their activities" (ibid.). Sensory knowledge is considered as an area of study and a way of communication. Within the sensory, more speculative practices of research flourish.

While much of the first generation of research dealing with the sensory in multispecies ethnography focused on human-animal relationships, more recent studies have turned to the study of plants. What has been called the "plant turn" by authors such as Natasha Myers (2015) and John Hartigan (2017) is a growing interest in organisms that are radically different from human (and animal) bodies. Advocating for a "species-level reflexivity", plant ethnographers seek to "overcome notions of alterity and otherness that make plants so difficult to comprehend" from the standpoint of a Western knowledge perspective (Hartigan 2017: 2). Drawing from his fieldwork among the Amazonian Runa people Eduardo Kohn illustrates how the Runa engage with the forest as a sentient and communicative entity, convincingly moving beyond a human-centered framework of anthropology (Kohn, 2013). Theresa L. Miller's multispecies ethnography of people and plants in the indigenous Canela community of the Brazilian Cerrado is a further contribution to a growing canon of research engaging with the entangled realms of the sensory and the more-than-human. Miller's work focuses on the ways the Canela, who understand plants as their kin, engage with the botanical world, and how their interactions support "multispecies care, survival and well-being" over time (Miller, 2019: 2). Through a framework termed "sensory ethnobotany", Miller takes "seriously" people-plant sensory experiences such as "humans handling, smelling, listening to, tasting, and responding to plants, and of plants responding to human touch and communicating in their own sensory ways of growth, movement, and chemical utterances" (Miller, 2019: 4).

Multispecies ethnography promotes an all-encompassing perspective. The approach seeks to go explore ways of being that are human and 'beyond human'. Many of anthropology's contributions to the sensory and multispecies approach draw from studies of Indigenous cosmologies. Eduardo Viveiros de Castro for example has framed the notion of "perspectival multinaturalism" (1998) on the basis of studies of Amerindian communities in the Amazon and posited that "humans, animals, and spirits participate in the same world, although with different sensory apparati, with the effect of generating only partially overlapping ontologies" (Kirksey and Helmreich, 2010: 553). Including the more-than-human raises new many questions. How does the hon-human express itself? How does consensus building among human "spokespeople" (Latour 2004) function? And what are the limits of 'understanding'? As such multispecies ethnography requires a new framing of *the problem of voice*, a "cannonical anthropological problematic" brought forward by Arjun Appadurai (1988) (Kirksey and Helmreich, 2010: 554).

It is important to note that much of social anthropology's recent contributions to understanding Indigenous ontologies are taking place in configurations *of* the Anthropocene – e.i. environments heavily impacted by extractive-capitalism and climate change (Miller 2019). Studying more-than-human dynamics in the capitalist landscape of palm-oil plantations on Marind territories in Wes Papua, Sophie Chao presents these sites as "agentive assemblages" where "Marind subvert the notion of 'nature' as passive and singular object of human control" (Chao, 2021: 486). Examining how Marind engage materially and imaginatively with organisms living in monocrop plantations, Chao shows how Marind views "complicate the prevailing critique of monocrops as ecologically impoverished landscapes" (Ibid.: 478). Having experienced displacement by the palm oil industry, Marind are fighting for their self-determination and resisting the state and corporations. In their struggle, Marind may identify with the parasites of the palm oil plantation, who become "figures of hope" for Marind, while mutualist organisms "point to cooperation and accommodation as an alternative strategy of survival" (Ibid.: 476). Chao's study reveals interesting insights in particular kinds of interspecies relations in monocrop

ecologies, where parasitic and mutualistic life forms of organism "generate indexical relations of trans-species significance for Marind that are at once material, political, affective, and moral, and historically situated" (Ibid.: 478).

Local Knowledge and Practices

Indigenous communities live in the most biodiverse areas, often comprising substantial resource-reserves such as oil, coal, natural gas, metals, stones, wildlife, and large carbon sinks such as forests. Much of the land inhabited by indigenous communities is held under customary ownership. The exact extent of communal land is not known, but many experts believe that at least half of the world's land area is held by Indigenous Peoples and other communities. Some estimates put the figure as high as 65 percent or more of the global land area. Indigenous Peoples hold an estimated 20 percent of the Earth's land mass, or one-half to one-third of the world's communally owned land. The 2015 report of Rights and Resources Initiative (RRI) however, found that globally, Indigenous Peoples and local communities have formal property rights to only 10 percent of the land they depend on. Another 8 percent involves land on which Indigenous peoples have some degree of state-recognized management rights. Without legal recognition, Indigenous peoples, communities, and their lands are "vulnerable to illegal, forced or otherwise unjust expropriation, capture and displacement by more powerful interests" (RRI, 2015). A nuanced analysis of the negotiation processes in which commons are embedded at all times is essential to the study of commons. Nonetheless, it is helpful to compare individual approaches to commoning in Indigenous communities as they highlight recurring struggles of postcolonial societies.

Innovations and knowledge produced within indigenous communities, are shaped by their respective ways of knowing, being and relating to the world, and often prioritize practices that maintain the balance and integrity of ecosystems, ensuring the long-term sustainability of resources. Because Indigenous ontologies are often associated with a specific place, knowledge produced within these communities most often displays a deep understanding of local contexts, and stems from close observations, experiences, and interactions with the environment. Indigenous knowledge (IK) about edible and medicinal plants and various properties of substances found in other non-human organisms, has long been the target of bioprospecting missions into Indigenous territories. Poorly protected by the exploitative mechanisms of bioprospecting, many of which violate their right to self-determination, Indigenous communities often face difficulties asserting their intellectual property rights and ensuring that their knowledge is adequately compensated. Indigenous communities may also find that their sacred or traditional knowledge and practices associated with specific objects are commercialized, distorted, or removed from their cultural and local context, resulting in a loss of cultural integrity.

In anthropology Indigenous knowledge studies have undergone substantial transformations in the past four decades. Anthropologists participated in the documentation and the promotion of indigenous or local knowledge and so-called traditional environmental knowledge (TEK), which was of great interest to international agricultural research centers and the World Bank and became "information currency" (Nazarena 2006: 321). In the 1990s, anthropologists showed great interest in comparing studies of local and indigenous knowledge with Western science, using an ethnoscientific approach to legitimize Indigenous knowledge "in terms of Western standards" (Ibid.). The second generation of Indigenous knowledge studies evolved in the wake of a postmodern critical wave. Scholars such as Arturo Escobar (1998) and Arun Agrawal (2002) criticized attempts to document and store local and indigenous knowledge, thus separating it from its local context. These scholars took an issue in what they recognized as a "static" perception of Indigenous knowledge, that aimed at "refunctionalizing" local knowledge "to Western ideas of conservation", which they saw as a possible "disservice not only to local knowledge but also to conservation and science" (ibid.). Freed from the "requirements of comparison and verification", Indigenous knowledge studies henceforth focused on the context in which it was developed and illuminated the agency of local people (ibid.). (see also subtheme 9)Conservation)

The literature presented in this review shows how a commons-approach can improve the recognition and protection of indigenous innovations and knowledge. The emphasis lies on an understanding of ownership and responsibilities towards resources that extend to non-human entities. Our concern is to show, on the one hand, what tactics indigenous groups use to join together communally and how this is

reflected in their land use and, on the other hand, how such practices can be incorporated into the global market and networks.

There are many case studies which have been done in social anthropology illustrating the link between local knowledge and practice and also to show how these are embedded in local ontologies. One of the many works is the one of Fikret Berkes (1999) who highlighted how the view local first nation groups in Canada (known as the Cree) manage their common property territory regarding fishing and hunting based on their knowledge of the behaviour of these animals, but also setting up rules and regulations based on their animistic ontology of these beings as actors presenting themselves for human use. However, this has to be done with respect and if this respect is violated by over- or also underuse, these animals will not make themselves available for humans. Communication then runs via shamans and demands rituals. This led to a subsistence orientation and to the idea of care for the land and its inhabitants as a commoning process. Similarly, Fairhead and Leach show in their book Misreading an African Landscape (1996) that local knowledge, practical use and animistic ontologies led to the creation of very diverse forest patches in Guinea (West Africa) and similar processes regarding hunting, fisheries and pastures are seen in African Floodplain Wetlands (see Haller eds 2010). These cases show that indigenous peoples had an impact on the landscape which is not pure nature nor *terria nullius* but often managed by common property institutions regulating practices based on indigenous knowledge and their animistic and totemistic ontologies (see also Haller 2019).

Clashes

Conflicts and clashes between actors occur when different interests occur and go by the name of clashes. It is an important term in the context of Indigenous people and globalization in relation to commons, because conflicts in which Indigenous groups are affected arise particularly from different notions of land access. An example is a work by Brenda J. Fitzpatrick (2021), who reports on a project called "Site C". A project to build a hydroelectric dam in Canada, which, however, mainly affects Indigenous settlements, which would be flooded in the event of construction. Although profitable due to the high energy supplier, the inhabitants of these settlements see the construction as a threat to their cultural existence. The author emphasizes an anthropological approach to conflict transformation as an approach to this problem. From the perspective of the commons, this is relevant because many indigenous societies would manage or manage resources at a communal level and their views and knowledge are based on communal management, but these are often not recognized by the government because they are not in the interests of the Indigenous communities. Contradictory views on "human responsibilities to the environment and other humans" (Fitzpatrick, 2021) can lead to conflicts such as that of "Site C". The idea of progress and technological potential could act as cultural violence according to Fitzpatrick.

In many cases, Indigenous societies or the local population have to bear the brunt, because political and economic systems usually work in favour of those who do not pursue communal resource management, but rather neoliberal economic interests, which are particularly concerned with increasing profits. In these cases, there is no legal protection for such societies and yet they have to deal with the consequences of decisions in which they do not have a say (McAndrew, Neef and Sochanny, 2018). Such consequences may be land grabbing (McAndrew et. al, 2018), or discrimination in the form of racist discourse (West, 2014). For indigenous groups, this can also lead to cultural alienation. In her work on her many years of field research in Indonesia, Paige West speaks of a "savage sloting", the stereotyping of the inhabitants of Papua New Guinea, which has led to economic and social disadvantage. True, there are also cases where local communities voluntarily turn away from old practices and adopt other models, such as the Lauje in the Indonesian highlands, which have turned from once communal land access to the capitalist model. Nevertheless, Li (2014) says that people were under pressure due to the dependence of the markets and over time more and more land was privatized due to the cultivation of cacao.

If Indigenous communities live in areas that are rich in resources, this is generally of great interest to the markets. If the economy is regulated in such a way that market mechanisms are allowed to run freely, this can mean a major interference in the country and thus in the livelihoods of many communities. In what follows we discuss specific examples from anthropological work on how such clashes are experienced in different regions of the world.

Clashes in high-lands

A clash between different interest groups can also be one that manifests itself in politics. The term "Indigenous cosmopolitics" refers to ideas that go beyond conventional political ideas, based on Indigenous perspectives. Such a clash can be observed in the Andes, for example, where Indigenous groups are making demands to the public to bring their concepts into politics. However, these concepts contradict political practice. The starting point of the clash between the fronts is an ontological conception of people and nature. Behind current political practice is a naturalistic notion that humans and nature are separate. This means that social coexistence is determined by humans as rational beings. This affects institutional interdependencies, of which politics is a part. However, the fact that this contradicts fundamental perspectives of different communities is quickly ignored. Marisol de la Cadena (2010), explains how such a clash plays out in the Andes.

Indigenous populations living in these regions do not see a separation between people and nature. What many people know as nature are, for such communities, beings that are also sentient. These should also be included in political decisions. But that this is a minority ontology, Indigenous interests are overshadowed. In Peru, according to de la Cadena, such movements are called "ethnic politics" (Marisol de la Cadena, 2010). What they propose is a different political practice. However, the rebellion of the Indigenous population in social movements can also mean a turning of the page and a breakthrough of modern politics. De La Cadena speaks of "rendering illegitimate (and, thus, denaturalising) the exclusion of Indigenous practices from nation-state institutions" (De la Cadena 2010, p. 3). With regard to the separation between people and nature in politics, de la Cadena refers to historical events that led to oppression in Latin America. Only fully-fledged humans could engage in politics. Practices with earth-beings were considered idolatry and in British America Locke authorised a war against natives who were considered unproductive because they were close to nature. "The object of policies of improvement, only through a process of transformation (e.g., through which they should deny the social relations they held with plants, rivers, or mountains) could "the naturals" gain active and legitimate access to politics" (de la Cadena, 2010, p. 344). Colonial discourses and misinterpretations of political reason explain tensions such as these in the Andes today.

For despite colonial oppression, Indigenous people were able to preserve their worldviews. These were adapted to those of the invaders. The new demands show the self-confidence of the Indigenous people. De la Cadena begins by giving an example of how such a social protest is expressed. It is a quote from the president of an Indigenous organisation from Equador. Years ago, he wrote a letter to the Pope in which he criticised the standards by which God would be defined. These correspond to the Western standard and do not represent the beliefs of his people, who, he says, were able to preserve their religion despite the invasion of the Europeans in the past and that they were able to learn to merge it with that of the colonialists (De la Cadena, 2010, pp. 5-6).

Clashes in low-lands

In favour of economic pursuits or proclaimed conservation, land grabbing can be a consequence for Indigenous communities, who are usually left behind because they are a minority in their interests, practices and worldviews. The liberalisation of the free market can result in land being taken from the local population. This is often at the expense of indigenous communities, who usually have a close connection to and are dependent on the inhabited environment. Land grabbing as a result of clashes between Indigenous communities and other actors is a recurrent "phenomenon". One example of land grabbing on Indigenous land is in Cambodia. More specifically, in the north-east of Cambodia, where many Indigenous people live. Land grabbing in these regions comes from the government, which passes laws that undermine access to communal land. People lack the legal means to counter this. In the past, communal land has been seized by outside immigrants and entrepreneurs. At the same time, attempts were made to stimulate the economy by cultivating crops, but this resulted in a dwindling of resources and forests, to the detriment of the Indigenous population. In addition, an economic gap was opened up by the market economy: the richer became richer through the accumulation of land, while the poorer were left behind and became poorer. For the Indigenous population, the result was that many became impoverished. (McAndrew, Neef, & Sochanny Hak 2018)

In the Appalachians, there is a clash related to land resources. At the forefront is a dispute over the harvesting of ginseng. The root has been cultivated for commercial purposes in this region for over 200 years. Economically valuable, ginseng is highly sought after on the market, making it tempting to harvest and trade. However, for years there has been extreme commercial exploitation that threatens the stock. This has led to regulation of the ginseng trade (CITES), (Farley, 2022, 312). Under the regulations, some are allowed to harvest ginseng. However, these are relatively strict. Among other things, they are subject to US property laws. For example, ginseng may not be harvested on private land unless the land belongs to the person harvesting it. In addition to other rules, it is usually the case that one must obtain a permit in order to be allowed to pick the plant. However, since many residents live in poor economic conditions, harvesting and trading the plant seems lucrative for them (Farley, 2022, 309), to the dismay of conservationists. A clash thus ensues between Appalachian residents and conservationists. This is further complicated by the fact that the local population in these areas has a different approach to nature. Thus, what is seen as a violation of the rules by conservationists is seen as legitimate by the local population. Access to the land and thus also the harvesting of ginseng plants is traditionally understood as common property. Whoever harvests them is also the owner, regardless of the legal landowner. The clash between the actors is further complicated by the rhetoric of the natural owners towards the illegal ginseng prospectors. Thus, they would be "greedy, lazy, and irresponsible, willing to steal from others to make a quick buck" (Farley, 2022, 311). By trespassing on other people's land, these people are thus criminalised, even though they do not see themselves as criminals at all and the law on which the harvesting is based does not correspond to their views. Fairley goes on to write that these rural people, who often live in difficult economic circumstances, can rarely make political decisions regarding conservation. (Fairly, 2022, 319)

While the rural population is marginalized from the outside and illegal forest users are scorned and at the same time held responsible, because of them the conservation of ginseng would decline, paradoxically, industries are formed in these areas at the same time, which cause much greater ecological damage in comparison. Fairley writes: "activities like timber harvesting, coal mining, road and pipeline construction, and recreational development impact ginseng populations and habitats at a much greater scale" (Fairly 2022, 311). At the same time, local people are denied access to their habitat by conservationists and industries. The article shows the far-reaching consequences of a clash between actors. Local people, who have a communal understanding of their land, are in a weaker position vis-à-vis external regulations, such as the Property Act, which can lead to marginalisation. Different understandings of what constitutes proper access to land can lead to such a clash. The view of land as common property by local people is misinterpreted by conservationists. The result is an exclusion of Appalachian people from their own land access. The additional stereotyping encourages this process all the more, neglecting other factors such as industrialisation, which is accelerating the decline of ginseng faster than the illegal pickers.

Similar clashes are to be seen in drylands as Haller et al (eds) 2019, 2022, Kronenburg et al (eds.) (2023) and Haller and Weissman (eds.) (2023) show in edited volumes. These are especially related to land as commons grabbing for agro-industrial production, conservation and mega-infrastructure processes and especially lead to evictions of pastoral indigenous communities in Africa (see also subthemes 6, Drama of the Grabbed Commons and 9 Conservation).

What now? Who is we?

In the past decades globally connected Indigenous movements and advocacy groups have and gained more visibility on international stages and their contributions and powerful statements have shaped environmental policy making. Moreover, the global political debate on pathways for the inclusion of Indigenous worldviews in state constitutions and legal systems, and the recognition of Indigenous rights more broadly, is echoed in social anthropology. In what follows, we would like to introduce some of the important questions that arise from the intertwined challenges of the hegemony of modern Western ontology and the problem of voice.

Referring to Marisol de la Cadena and Elizabeth Povinelli, Mario Blaser unveils the mechanisms of dominance based on universal science that creates "the limit beyond which cultural demands become unreasonable and therefore deserving of the disciplinary force of coercion to keep them in check" (Blaser, 2013: 555). Thinking with Balser, we might want to ask if we are ever going to establish an understanding of others that will lead to politically active ontological differences (Ibid.: 559). Highly skeptical of the "liberal desire to understand everyone" Blaser urges further debate on a better engagement with terms such as 'radical difference' and 'otherness' (Ibid.).

> „The assumption that 'our' established categories are enough is perhaps the most insidious way in which claims of an all-encompassing modernity do Sameing while seeking to articulate a passionate, yet sober, commitment to differences without inequalities." (Blaser, 2013, p. 558)

In response to Mario Blaser, anthropologists Arturo Escobar and Anders Burman both share the view that Indigenous struggles could "illuminate effective paths toward the planet's ontological reconstitution", "but only", Escobar adds, "if we are willing to deepen our epistemic-ontological 'declassing' [...] and newly approach radical alterity from the perspective of the ontological conflicts and stories of peoples 'in spite of Europe'" (Escobar in Blaser: 2013: 562).

The study of current political struggles is indispensable in order to avoid "a lack of attention to people's everyday concerns and practices and sweeping generalizations about 'indigenous knowledge', and disembedded references to a selection of indigenous concepts" (Burman in Blaser, 2013: 561). Keeping track of what's happening 'on the ground', is to pay attention to the political situations in which Indigenous concepts may be incorporated into the prevailing political discourse. Referring to the assimilation of Indigenous concepts such as *suma qamaña*, *pachakuti*, and *pachamama* in Bolivia, Burman points to the attenuation and commodification that such concepts must live through when they enter the "political market" (ibid.).

Therefore, a dialogue is needed also using concepts of action and engaged anthropology in order to discuss in a participatory way what type of shared research is needed that is sensitive to the colonial past. Participatory bottom-up institution building processes (constitutionality, see Haller, Acciaioli and Rist 2016) based on collaborative and shared research (Haller and Zinggerli 2020) might be a way forward in the collaboration of indigenous peoples as well as their umbrella organisations (see ICCA 2023).

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