

Critical Interventions: Dilemmas of Accountability in Contemporary Ethnographic Research

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Anthropologists are accountable in unique ways to “the people we study” in “the field.” Yet today “the field” is more likely to be some transnational process linking multiple actors, sites, and agendas rather than a bounded physical space. To whom, then, are we accountable in a world of blurred boundaries and of intersecting and often contradictory oppressions based on gender, class, ethnicity, nationality, and sexuality? Are we equally accountable to everyone we encounter in “the field?” If not, are there some ethical or political principles that we can use to help us determine to whom we are most accountable and how? In this essay I explore these questions through an interrogation of my own work on the cultural politics of “indigenous” development among Maasai in Tanzania.

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The fundamental fact that shapes the future of anthropology is that it deals in knowledge of others. Such knowledge has always implied ethical and political responsibilities, and today the “others” whom anthropologists have studied make those responsibilities explicit and unavoidable. One must consider the consequences for those among whom one works of simply being there, of learning about them, and of what becomes of what is learned (Hymes 1969: 48).

Contemporary anthropologists and others engaged in ethnographically based cultural critique occupy a precarious position: the prolonged intimacy of the ethnographic engagement, as well as personal and disciplinary ethics, make us accountable in unique ways to the people we study for the possible consequences of our work and writing, however intended or unintended. While we share an interest with our colleagues in the humanities in studying "texts" to distill the tropes, metaphors, images, and ideas that shape practices, we also meet, interview, and interact with the producers, distributors, and recipients of such "texts" through ethnographic fieldwork. While equally concerned with the positionings of subaltern "voices," the production of colonialist narratives, the reproduction of power, and contesting notions of "history," "identity," and "authenticity," we confront these issues through the intimate particulars of a people positioned in space and time. We do not just read the subaltern "voice," we hear it, engage it in conversation, see it in the faces of those we work with. Thus, what makes ethnographically based cultural critique so much richer—that is, our engagement with peoples as well as "texts"—is what from another perspective makes it so problematic, in terms of the potential repercussions of our work for those we study.

Obviously, all researchers confront ethical dilemmas, including accountability issues similar to those described here. I focus on anthropology in part because it is the disciplinary position from which I operate, but also because anthropologists rely on ethnographic methods, especially participant-observation, to "build rapport" and forge personal relationships with people as we observe and participate in sometimes quite intimate aspects of their lives. Much of our "data" is collected through informal conversations, casual observations, and other unobtrusive interactions for which it is impossible to request "informed consent" at every turn. As Bourgois notes:

... participant/observation fieldwork by its very definition dangerously stretches the anthropological ethic of informed consent... We are supposed to "build rapport" and develop such a level of trust and acceptance in our host societies that we do not distort social interaction. Anything less leads to the collection of skewed or superficial data. How can we reconcile effective participation with truly "informed consent?" Is rapport-building not just another way of saying "encourage people to forget that you are constantly observing them and registering everything they are saying and doing?" Technically, to maintain truly informed consent we should interrupt controversial conversations and activities to re-announce our presence and to make sure everyone is aware of the implications of what they

are saying or doing. . . . [But] [i]f we recited to our informants their rights to privacy and informed consent—like police officers arresting a suspect—every time we spoke with them we would make terrible fieldworkers (Bourgeois 1990: 52).

The issues of accountability and consequences are thus much more personalized and therefore precarious in ethnographic research than in other kinds of research. As Nancy Scheper-Hughes learned all too painfully when she published her research on mental illness in Ireland, the personal relationships we conscientiously build with people “in the field” make them vulnerable to hurt, harassment, or even harm when the knowledge they have shared circulates beyond their control (Scheper-Hughes 1982; cf. Stacey 1988).

Thirty years ago, a group of anthropologists examined the political-economic context that had shaped the historical development of the theories, assumptions, and practices of anthropology as a discipline (Hymes 1969). They called, in various ways, for a “reinvention” of anthropology to account for the changed circumstances of a post-colonial world in which political-economic hierarchies of race, nation, and class were still all too evident. Ten years later, similar concerns (now including sexism) motivated authors in another important collection to foreground the issue of “politics” in the production and use of anthropological knowledge (Huizer and Mannheim 1979). These authors and others (e.g. Asad 1973; Berreman 1968; Gough 1968a, 1968b) were primarily concerned with the global structures of inequality between the “dominators” and “dominated”; they reminded “First World” anthropologists of their ethical and political accountability for the consequences of their research and writing for the (predominantly) “Third World” people they researched and wrote about.¹ The issues of accountability of the 1960s and 1970s were therefore posed in terms of concern at the persistence of scientific colonialism, distress over the collaboration of some anthropologists with colonial and imperialist regimes, outrage that others had engaged in covert research on behalf of the CIA and other US government agencies (cf. Price 1998), and similar expressions of “First World” paternalism, exploitation, and power. Despite calls for “studying up” (Nader 1969) and other remedies, however, the normative structures and objectives of anthropological “fieldwork” remained much the same: extended periods of participant-observation among supposedly “bounded,” “localized” communities most often found in rural areas of the “Third World.”²

According to the revised Code of Ethics of the American Anthropological Association (1998), anthropologists have "primary ethical obligations" to the "people... they study and to the people with whom they work."³ These obligations, which comprise what I refer to as "accountability," include "to avoid harm or wrong," "to respect [their] well-being," and "to consult actively with the affected individuals or group(s), with the goal of establishing a working relationship that can be beneficial to all parties involved." Remarkably, the Code does not address the fact that the contours of "the field" for ethnographic research have changed dramatically over the past decade, so that "the people we study" are rarely (if ever) a single group. These days, as anthropologists study transnational⁴ processes, transnational relations, or transnational identities, "the field" is more likely to incorporate multiple actors, sites, and agendas rather than a bounded physical space (Appadurai 1991, 1996; Gupta 1992; Gupta and Ferguson 1992, 1997a, 1997b).⁵

These transnational linkages and associated transnational movements and alliances (Escobar 1992; Featherstone 1990; Smith 1994) have blurred the boundaries of local/global, insider/outsider, studying up/studying down, First World/Third World, and so on, complicating any easy determination of our accountability.⁶ "The people we study" may well still include rural communities, but they often encompass corporations, government agencies, non-governmental organizations, missionaries, and other transnational agents. Each of these groups exists in particular, dynamic, and historically contingent relationships of power (economic, political, cultural, or otherwise) with each other. Furthermore, these diverse research subjects are themselves divided by such power inequalities as gender, class, and "race." Anthropologists are much more cognizant than before of the power hierarchies that separate the people we study. We no longer presume, for instance, that "communities," however isolated or subsistence-oriented, are homogenous, undifferentiated collectivities, but recognize the possibility of conflicting structural positions, interests, and perspectives.⁷

Given this restructured "field" of inquiry, anthropologists are increasingly faced with complex dilemmas of accountability for which there are no guidelines: if "the people we study" not only include multiple actors and sites, but are divided by intersecting and contradictory oppressions of class, gender, race, nation, and so forth, are we equally accountable to all of these subgroups for the possible consequences of our work? If not, are there some ethical or political

principles that we can use to help us determine to whom we are most accountable and how? In the remainder of this essay, I attempt to distill some preliminary guidelines for determining our accountability in such situations through an interrogation of my own work on the cultural politics of "indigenous" development organizations (IDOs). My study of several "Maasai" development organizations in Tanzania demonstrates the profound gender and class politics of indigenous development as elite men assert their power as "authentic," "indigenous" representatives to attract international resources and attention, and subsequently reconfigure local power relations. As a "progressive" institution, "indigenous" development may therefore have oppressive consequences. In critiquing the gender and class basis of their claims and practices, however, I confront a critical dilemma: state officials and other opponents are eager to reconsolidate their political control over Maasai by discrediting and dismantling these emerging political movements. To whom then am I most accountable, and how? To the elite male leaders of the Maasai IDOs in their ongoing battles with the state apparatus? To the Maasai women and other Maasai subgroups who are disenfranchised by the practices of the IDOs? Or to both groups, in different ways?

"INDIGENOUS" DEVELOPMENT

The phrase "indigenous" development refers to efforts by peoples to organize themselves into local development organizations based on certain identity claims about being "indigenous." At once local and global, indigenous development is a product of current "First World" interests in empowering "marginal" groups and the success of certain "Third World" peoples in strategically essentializing their own identities to defend rights, mobilize resources, and advance seemingly progressive agendas (e.g., Conklin and Graham 1995; Jackson 1995; T. Turner 1991). "Strategically essentialize" refers to the intentional manipulation, projection, and homogenization by "indigenous" people, among others, of their cultural identities to accord with "Western" stereotypes in order to demand certain cultural, political, and economic rights. Although "indigenous" is most commonly used to refer to the first inhabitants of areas such as the Americas where subsequent colonizers eventually became the dominant, majority population, the term has been used in Africa by distinct cultural minorities such as Maasai who have been historically repressed by majority populations of Africans in control of the state

apparatus (Murumbi 1994).⁸ In Tanzania, for instance, Maasai distinguish themselves from the "Swahili" majority with reference to their differences of language (Maasai speak Maa, a "Nilotic" language completely unrelated to Swahili), different modes of production (Maasai have been primarily pastoralists for the past few centuries), dress, customs, rituals, and so forth.⁹

In order to understand the emergence and implications of indigenous development as a popular, current transnational development agenda, my work analyzes the objectives, policies, and practices of several indigenous development organizations (IDOs) that have been started by Maasai in Tanzania.¹⁰ My "field" for this research project includes these IDOs, their international sponsors, the communities in which they operate, the national government of Tanzania, as well as the "texts" (documents, interview transcripts) that discuss the transnational discourses of "indigenous" and "development" promoted by the United Nations, Cultural Survival, anthropologists, and other individuals and institutions. Since these IDOs first emerged in 1990, I have spent days and weeks at a time interviewing leaders and members, participating in and observing their interactions at their offices, staff meetings, community visits, and other fora, and discussing their work with other Maasai and non-Maasai. From the beginning, my relationships with the IDO leaders was built on prior personal and professional ties: a few were former students of mine from when I taught Form Six for a year at a local secondary school; some were my close colleagues when I worked for and eventually ran an interdenominational development team affiliated with the local Catholic Diocese;¹¹ others I had met and worked with in the course of that development work (which occurred primarily in Maasai areas). In fact, some organizers initially sought my advice on questions of outreach, organizational structure, and donor funding. I also had prior contacts with some of the international sponsors and many of the concerned district and regional government officials.

Although the topic of indigenous development is a recent focus of my research, it has emerged as part of my long-term research project, a project motivated in part by questions and concerns raised by my earlier work as a development practitioner. A brief review of that research and its findings provides needed historical context to the current complexities of Maasai gender and ethnic relations, as well as to my involvement in Maasai affairs. That study, based on long-term ethnographic research and archival work, explores the gendered and

ethnic dimensions of "development" through an ethnohistorical analysis of the shifting objectives, practices, and effects of development since its emergence in the early British colonial period until the present. The ethnographic research took place in three Maasai communities, and the methods included participant-observation, a census of socio-economic data, lengthy semi-structured interviews with a stratified random sample of adult residents, oral history, and life histories, archival work, and interviews with and participant observation of government, missionary and development personnel who had worked in the communities.

My research has carefully documented and demonstrated how certain fixed images of "the Maasai" as male pastoralists, warriors, and nomads have combined with historically specific (and often contradictory) political-economic objectives to justify and produce certain development interventions, interventions that have contributed to the economic, political, and cultural disenfranchisement of most Maasai women. Influenced by their gendered ideas, as well as popular imagery of "the Maasai," first British, then Tanzanian state administrators have recognized only Maasai men as the "true" pastoralists, native "authorities," taxpayers, decision-makers, property owners, and political actors. Most colonial and post-colonial development interventions have therefore been directed at Maasai men, who have used the opportunity to consolidate their control over livestock, land, money, and political power (Hodgson 1995, 1999a in press).¹² Maasai women of all ages bitterly complain about their lost rights in livestock, their circumscribed access to income-earning opportunities, and men's overreaching assertions of economic control and political authority (Hodgson 1999c).

Ironically, at the same time that these development interventions empowered Maasai men in relation to Maasai women, they served to reify Maasai ethnicity, isolate and exclude Maasai from economic opportunities and political power at the level of the nation-state, and thereby facilitate their marginalization as an ethnic group (e.g., Hodgson 2000). The result has been a deeply ambivalent, at times hostile relationship between Maasai and non-Maasai peoples in Tanzania, and increasing impoverishment among Maasai as their land, livestock, and possibilities for viable livelihoods continue to disappear (Hodgson 1995).¹³ Although Maasai have been neglected by most state-sponsored development initiatives, they have been engaged in intense, at times violent disputes with government officials over the huge areas of their land that have been alienated for hunting

blocks, ecotourist camps, wildlife “conservation” efforts, gameparks, and large commercial farms. For their part, until quite recently, most large governmental and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) were reluctant to enter into this volatile political landscape, especially after the failure of one of the largest “pastoralist” development projects in recent history, the \$21 million dollar, ten-year USAID Maasai Range and Livestock Development Project, which ran from 1969 to 1979.¹⁴ Some smaller NGOs, particularly those with affiliations to religious organizations, sponsored small development projects among Maasai, but most of these donors and organizations channeled their development assistance and financial aid through their national offices and local affiliates, which were usually staffed with their own nationals in managerial positions and Tanzanians (few of them Maasai) in fieldworker, clerical, and service positions.

Partly in response to recent global campaigns for the rights of “indigenous” peoples and partly in response to the perceived failure of the Tanzanian government to meet their “development” needs (cf. Friedman 1994), several “Maasai” development organizations have emerged in the past few years in Tanzania organized around claims of a common “indigenous” identity based on ethnicity (“Maasai”).¹⁵ As I demonstrate in detail elsewhere (Hodgson nd), these “indigenous” development organizations (IDOs) define their agendas and objectives through explicit links to transnational discourses about the rights of “indigenous” peoples, the privileged relationship between indigenous peoples and their “environment,” and the necessity for “development” projects that are environmentally “sustainable.” To give but one example, in a project document written to publicize its program and funding needs to international donors, one Maasai IDO demands:

[T]he realization that African indigenous minorities are an integral part of the worldwide extended family of indigenous peoples... who despite their far apart concrete socio-ecological environments have maintained their ages old community value systems and coherent views on the universe totality in a very perverse world power configuration dominated by the cult of reckless conquest (KIPOC 1991: 6–7).

The Maasai struggle, therefore, is “part of the global struggle of indigenous peoples to restore respect to their rights, cultural identity and to the land of their birth” (KIPOC 1991: 7). Framed in terms of these transnational discourses, their objectives include lobbying for territorial claims and political recognition, as well as implementing

development projects such as building schools, expanding water supplies, and improving health services. In contrast to the bleak development scenario of the 1970s and 1980s, these IDOs have been quite successful in obtaining financial support from international donors to fund workshops, training, development projects, office construction, land surveys, and more.

Among these Maasai IDOs in Tanzania, however, it is educated, elite men (my friends, former colleagues, and students) who assert themselves as the "authentic," "indigenous" representatives in order to circumvent the state, attract substantial international attention and resources, and use their new-found political power and economic assets to implement their particular, very gendered visions of development. The leaders and active members of these IDOs are mostly well-educated men considered "junior-elders" (ages 35–45) within the Maasai age-set system. No women, educated or uneducated, work in the central organizations, although some IDOs have created peripheral structures ("women's wings") to placate the few donors who insist on attention to women's issues. Not surprisingly, the development projects organized by the IDOs take little account of the needs, desires, or perspectives of Maasai women. While some projects (like water projects) help women in terms of their household responsibilities, most replicate and reinforce existing patriarchal relations of power by assigning control for the design, implementation, and management of the projects to men (usually educated) in the community. Ironically, at the same time that the leaders of this new, transnational form of organization mobilize around promises of "progress" and "modernity," they justify the exclusion of women by appeals to "tradition" and "culture" (Hodgson n.d.). Of course, what is important here is not just the gendered practices of educated men, but the complicity of donors and NGOs in accepting such practices. Few donors have criticized the exclusion of women from the organizational structures of the IDOs, or the failure to include women in the selection, design, and implementation of most projects.¹⁶

A compelling example of these gender politics occurred at the First Maasai Conference on Culture and Development in 1991, where one of the first Maasai IDOs was founded. Sponsored by three Nordic development agencies, the conference attracted over 180 delegates from outside and inside the country, including what the organizer, an educated Maasai man, called "Maasai cultural resource participants" ("traditional leaders" from twenty-five localities among four

sections of Tanzanian Maasai) and “Maasai dialogue participants” (“educated Maasai, Government and Party Officials, Church leaders, development workers and scholars/authors of Maa-Literature”) (Inyuat e-Maa 1991b: 1). The gender hierarchies presented and reinforced at the conference, which I attended as an invited “dialogue participant,” were strikingly clear: while the meeting room was full of Maasai men, two educated Maasai women, and a scattering of Euro-American scholars and development workers, uneducated Maasai women were relegated to the balcony outside the main conference, where they were supposed to display their beadwork for conference participants as part of a “Maasai Women’s Cultural Exhibit.”

In a conversation prior to the conference, when I questioned the organizer about this gendered divide, he replied that including the women in the main conference would be “against tradition,” as “women were never included in the meetings men held to decide community affairs.” “Since when,” I curtly replied, “was a ‘First Maasai Conference on Culture and Development,’ comprising men of all ages, clans, and areas, ever considered a traditional meeting?” In reply, he just shrugged and reiterated his claims of supporting Maasai “tradition.” In the final conference report, he justified the exclusion of women from the main conference because of their “traditionally” greater concern with moral and cultural issues, as opposed to the political and economic issues which interest men (Inyuat e-Maa 1991b: 23). This particular appeal to “tradition” is of course very different from that used by several elder men (“cultural resource participants”) who angrily walked out of the Conference on the first day, after demanding to know why these elite young men were usurping the male elders’ authority as community leaders and decision-makers.

The Maasai case suggests, therefore, that such transnational alliances as that between the IDOs and their sponsors are often predicated on a definition of “indigenous” that ignores the significant power differences of gender, age, class, and education that can exist in such groups. Instead, like earlier uses of “tribe” and “community,” “indigenous” evokes an image of non-stratified, “simple,” even “primitive” peoples (cf. Bétéille 1998). By foregrounding the forms of difference masked by the term “indigenous,” my project demonstrates that, although a particular image of Maasai identity is being used to promote a seemingly more “progressive” agenda than that implemented by colonial officials and state administrators, the effects for most Maasai

women are still very much the same: continuing, if not increased economic, political, and cultural disenfranchisement.

CRITICAL INTERVENTIONS

In challenging the gender and class biases of the claims and practices of these "indigenous" development organizations and their international sponsors, however, I confront a critical dilemma. As a study of a popular, contemporary ideology of "development," my project is important because it demonstrates the profound gendering of this transnational discourse: in the cultural ideas and practices of both the international donors promoting this policy and the young men benefiting from it and in the consequences of this political alliance for the reconfiguration of local gendered power relations. But politically, the consequences are potentially more ominous. State officials and other opponents are eager to reconsolidate their political control over Maasai by discrediting and dismantling these emerging political movements.

At the same time that "indigenous" development is a "progressive" institution in terms of countering historical oppression by the nation-state, it has oppressive consequences in terms of gender and class relations within the "indigenous" group. Given the possible negative consequences of my work, as well as my transnational "field" of research, to whom am I accountable for my research and writing? Am I most accountable to the Maasai men organizing these IDOs, whose broad agendas for the economic and political empowerment of Maasai peoples I strongly support? What about the majority of Maasai women, whose continuing economic, political, and cultural disenfranchisement by these same men and IDOs I have so carefully documented? These questions are of course further complicated by the intertwined strands of my long-term personal and professional relationships with many of the men and women involved.

My critical interventions, however mundane they may seem, could still be used to undermine both the emerging IDOs and their international sponsors. It is a deep irony, in fact, that government administrators not known for their sympathy to gender issues could use my findings about gender discrimination to discredit the IDOs as non-representative of the interests they claim to represent. At the same time, evidence about the increasing political and economic power of elite Maasai men could lead to accusations by the government that

the international NGOs are financing political empowerment in the guise of development.

Mindful of charges that some anthropologists may exaggerate the importance of their work or its political consequences (Gupta 1995, but cf. Bourgois 1990; Hill 1994), I would argue that in the Maasai case, such fears of negative political consequences are not groundless. The Tanzanian government (like the colonial government before it) has long feared the possibility of Maasai organizing themselves into viable political parties along ethnic lines. Contributing to this fear is worry that Maasai in Tanzania might ignore the sacrosanct "national" boundaries, and ally themselves with their more politically powerful brethren in Kenya.

A quick review of the Maasai position in Kenya is important here: unlike Tanzanian Maasai, Kenyan Maasai have several powerful leaders in the national government to represent their interests, protect their land rights, and ensure access to lucrative "development" projects. These elite Maasai leaders have managed through various means to create and sustain strong support among their constituencies, especially young *ilmurran* (men of the "warrior" age set). In fact, these *ilmurran* are often called on by these elite politicians as a paramilitary force of sorts, as seen in the often tense and occasionally violent disputes over land in western Kenya, and in the much publicized physical attacks by *ilmurran* against opposition politicians in the urban center of Nairobi.

Fueled by these warrior images, fears of transnational Maasai organizing, and rumors of possible secession efforts, the Tanzanian government blocked attempts to form a Maasai political party in the early 1960s, and again in the 1970s (Hodgson 1995). The leaders of several Maasai IDOs have continually been harassed, and their efforts to register officially with the government were delayed for years. Even now that the IDOs are registered, their members, meetings, and projects are still the subject of continual surveillance and occasional interference by government officials. For example, the Tanzanian government canceled two prior meetings of the First Maasai Conference (discussed above) because it initially included Kenyan Maasai scholars, activists, and representatives. At the second scheduled meeting, Tanzania immigration officials refused to allow Kenyan delegates to enter the country to attend the conference. Only when the organizers agreed to limit participation to Tanzanian citizens (and expatriate scholars from the United States and Europe), was permission to hold the conference reinstated.

POLITICAL AND ETHICAL DIMENSIONS OF ACCOUNTABILITY

The issues of accountability illustrated by this case are much more complicated quandaries than explicit transgressions of our ethical code such as collaboration with covert actions or conscious misrepresentations of our research methods, objectives, and funding. Nor are they solely a matter of the power relations between "researcher" and "researched," but of the varying degrees and kinds of power among the "researched" which existed and continue to exist regardless of any researcher's interest or involvement. Ethical guidelines must always account, I believe, for these power differences, so ethical decisions are therefore inherently political. I would argue that an ethical and political stance that holds that we are equally accountable to all people masks the sometimes quite stark differences in economic, political, and cultural power that exist among these people. In my case, to speak of equal accountability to "all people," serves, like the category "indigenous," to obscure the relationships of power between Maasai men and women, other Tanzanian people, the international NGOs, and myself. We therefore need ethical guidelines that help us account for such power differences and weigh the benefits of our work against its possible consequences.

In interrogating my own work, I have developed three preliminary steps toward such an assessment. The first step is to ascertain who the distinct groups are to whom we are accountable and to evaluate the historical and contemporary political, economic, and socio-cultural power relations among them. What are the multiple, intersecting, and sometimes contradictory relations of gender, class, race, and nation that structure "the people we study?" In the Maasai case, my historical and contemporary research demonstrates clear divisions of gender and class among Maasai, as well as hierarchies of ethnicity, race, class, and nation between the IDOs, donors, and the state. These divisions raise questions of time (how have these distinctions been historically produced and therefore varied over time?) and scale (how, for example, do gender inequalities at the "local" level intersect with and complicate ethnic differences at the national level?).

The second step is to assess the negative and positive consequences (political, economic, or otherwise) of our research and publication for each group. Negative outcomes may vary from causing embarrassment and shame to our informants (Scheper-Hughes 1982), to imperiling the political legitimacy and therefore political futures of

Maasai IDOs (my case), to endangering people's lives and livelihoods (Bourgeois 1990; Hill 1994). Positive results could include increasing awareness of certain cases of oppression, garnering political support for particular social movements, or challenging persistent stereotypes. Obviously we can never predict or control all the outcomes of our work, but we can give careful thought to those we can foresee.

One related issue is how and to whom we communicate our findings. In my case, I have been very open with everyone involved about my conclusions, engaging in ongoing debate with the IDO leaders about their practices, sharing my views with their donors, and discussing my work with Maasai women and others marginalized by the IDOs. A second concern is what our intention is in doing and publishing the research. In addition to discussing my work with "the people I study," I also write for scholarly audiences. But my intention for all audiences is not to be critical for the sake of demonstrating my cleverness, but to transform both the practices I am criticizing and the perspectives of those who participate in and study them. My critical interventions are thus multi-sided: I engage all sides of debate, including the state, international donors, and Maasai activists and scholars who obscure and ignore overlapping layers of oppression by embracing a static, homogenous concept of "indigenous" people. Like Gupta and Ferguson, I see our "political task not as 'sharing' knowledge with those who lack it, but as forging links between *different* knowledges that are possible from different locations and tracing lines of possible alliance and common purpose between them" (Gupta & Ferguson 1997a: 39). At the same time, it is difficult to avoid having colonial officials (in the past) or CIA agents and state officials (in the present) use our work as "background reading" to learn about the social and political organization of certain societies in order to control better, manipulate, or infiltrate them (Bourgeois 1990).

Finally, we must determine whether support for the most oppressed group (in a given time and place) is worth the consequences for the other (perhaps differently oppressed) groups. To foreground one form of inequality, however, is not to ignore others; accountability is not a zero-sum game or an either/or situation. My critical attention to how IDOs exacerbate gender inequality does not mean that I ignore the inequalities of class and ethnicity that shape the relationship of Maasai, and therefore Maasai IDOs with the Tanzanian state. To be accountable to Maasai women does not deny my accountability to

Maasai men; rather, it clarifies my political and theoretical priorities in difficult situations, producing a sense of my differentiated responsibility to these groups.

Furthermore, I would argue that no political movement, however seemingly "progressive," is immune from critical examination. Maasai IDOs cannot afford, I believe, to continue to ignore the increasingly vocal complaints of constituencies such as non-elite women and senior men whom they claim to represent. If they do so, they will implode under the stress of these internal political struggles, and be unable to truly represent and advance Maasai interests at the national and international levels.

The alternative—not to intervene—also has political consequences, which are, in this case, to condone, if not sanction the continued disenfranchisement of most Maasai women. There is no neutral position in ethnographic research and writing (or other kinds of research and writing): to be neutral is to side with the structures of domination, be they global capitalism, imperialism, or patriarchy (cf. Katz 1992). The process of research, however objective and detached some might pretend it to be, is always interwoven with other processes of domination and webs of power relations. As Rajesh Tandon, among others, reminds us, "research in social settings has always been political and either maintains, explains or justifies the status quo or provides data to those who want to question, examine or transform it" (Tandon 1981: 28, see also Hymes 1969: 50). Until recently, my critical interventions were mainly addressed to the discursive practices of colonial administrators, state officials, and NGOs. When groups like the Maasai IDOs invoke similar categories, with similar effects for most Maasai women, I cannot ignore their discursive practices, however much I might otherwise support certain of their agendas (such as their defense of land rights and mobilization for local empowerment).

Furthermore, as numerous feminist scholars have argued, such a standpoint offers not only the possibility of political solidarity, but theoretical advantages as well:

The vantage point of poor women... enables us not only to evaluate the extent to which development strategies benefit or harm the poorest and most oppressed sections of the people, but also to judge their impact on a range of sectors and activities crucial to socio-economic development and human welfare (Sen and Grown 1987: 23–24; see Hirshman 1995 for a critique).

To try to "see" from the perspective of the most oppressed—in this case, uneducated Maasai women—is not to imply that they are

“more knowledgeable” (Kabeer 1994: 81), nor to overromanticize or appropriate their position (Haraway 1988: 584). It is, instead, to try to envision and contribute to the creation of a better world in terms of material equalities, and to practice an emancipatory politics of not only engagement, but intervention and transformation.

In other words, the perspectives of non-elite Maasai women provide particular insights into the structures and processes of oppression produced and reproduced by indigenous development (Maasai women, as discussed below, are themselves hardly a homogenous group; they are stratified by wealth, education, marriage, and class position). To illustrate this point, let us return to the First Maasai Conference on Culture and Development discussed above: despite the organizer’s attempts to keep women on the periphery of the conference (both literally and figuratively), Maasai women did not passively accept their marginalization. Two young educated Maasai women attended, one of whom spoke passionately about the desperate need to support female education, and castigated the men present for their lack of attention to gender issues and inequalities. On the last day of the conference, a group of uneducated women in customary dress entered the conference hall and loudly protested their exclusion from the conference: “If this is a conference on Maasai development and culture,” one woman exclaimed, “then why were we women not invited to contribute? Are we not Maasai?” Stunned, the organizers tried to placate the women with promises that they were trying to represent the women’s best interests, but the women soon walked out.

In addition to challenging the claims of the conference organizer about the “traditional” roles of Maasai women in public meetings, this story demonstrates that non-elite Maasai women themselves are all too aware of the gendered strategies and effects of these IDOs. Their collective, public criticisms have been repeated in many private, individual conversations with me. Some see the IDOs as just one more strategy for certain Maasai men to further solidify their political and economic power over women; others carefully point out the new vehicles, houses, and businesses of some of these leaders and wonder about the their (mis)use of resources given in the name of all Maasai for their individual self-advancement. And a few women, such as the wives, mothers, and daughters of these men, benefit materially from their new incomes, which enable them to reproduce and elevate their class status.

Obviously, they do not need me to tell them what I have learned, but I certainly need them so that I can learn. In return, I try not only

to understand their situation, but to communicate their perspective and work for their empowerment. Towards that end, I do not just share my research findings with academic colleagues in conferences and publications, but with the leaders of Maasai IDOs, Maasai women, NGO administrators, and others, whether in tense debates, friendly chats, or more formal reports and presentations. While perhaps endangering the future relationship of the IDOs with the Tanzanian government, and even my relationship with the IDOs, NGOs, and the Tanzanian government, my critical interventions have helped produce some positive political action. In response to the complaints of Maasai women, pressure from one NGO, and (to a far lesser extent) my interventions, the same IDO that had organized the First Maasai Conference on Culture and Development organized a "Maasai Women's Conference" in 1996 (after the Second Maasai Conference held in 1994 restricted women to exhibiting their beadwork on the balcony as in the First Conference). Although not the equivalent of integrating women into the administration of the IDOs and their projects, the conference was still a first step towards identifying and incorporating the needs and perspectives of Maasai women.

Unfortunately, but perhaps not surprisingly, attendees of the Maasai Women's Conference were almost exclusively elite Maasai women (Inyuat e-Maa 1996). Most were wives or daughters of elite, educated Maasai men, including the IDO organizers. It seems that non-elite women were not even invited, although the status of the women attending would not necessarily be clear to donors unfamiliar with individual Maasai families. The class status of the attendees does not discredit their effort, but does reaffirm the necessity to examine carefully the complicated gender, ethnic, and class politics of indigenous development. In terms of my argument about accountability, it is the non-elite women to whom I believe I am most accountable.

CONCLUSION

These preliminary guidelines perhaps pose more questions than they answer. But they at least provide a starting point for revisiting and clarifying our ethical stance in the face of a restructured "field" of inquiry. Although the production and circulation of knowledge has always had political implications for those we study, as anthropologists we face new dilemmas of accountability as we pursue

research in transnational settings, among people for whom we are all too aware of their intersecting and overlapping hierarchies of gender, class, race, and so forth. While I would agree with Bourgois and many feminist scholar-activists that our disciplinary ethics should "require that our studies among the 'poor and powerless' contribute to their empowerment" (Bourgois 1990: 52), we must recognize and take into account the diversity of positions and power even within that group. When what we are studying is power, we cannot avoid such dilemmas.

NOTES

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1. Recent meta-theorists of the discipline, however, have narrowed their focus to examine issues of form and content in the text, rather than the context of its production and circulation. They probe the politics of writing ethnography, exploring issues of representation, ethnographic authority, and multivocality (see, for example, Clifford 1988; Clifford and Marcus 1986; Marcus and Fischer 1986; Wolf 1992).
2. The important exception to this is of course urban anthropology, which became more prominent during this period with studies of gender, ethnicity, migration, nationalism, and neighborhoods. But this path-breaking work was hardly the dominant norm, although much could have been learned from its research interests and methods.
3. Those anthropologists interested in teaching ethics should consult the useful Handbook on Ethical Issues in Anthropology (Cassell and Jacobs nd) available for downloading on the American Anthropological Association's web page.
4. In using "transnational," I follow Mato's definition: "those relations between two or more social subjects from two or more state-nations when at least one of these subjects is not an agent of a government or intergovernmental organization" (1997: 171). As he cautions, we must be careful to distinguish between "transnational relations," "transnational identities," "transnational agents," and, I would add, "transnational processes."
5. Although some anthropologists have researched transnational processes and multiple sites before this time period, it is only in the last decade or so that we have begun to develop theories about such multi-site, multi-actor research, so that the number of projects investigating transnational processes has increased.
6. Of course, as one reviewer of an earlier version of this essay pointed out: "In the past anthropologists contributed to the social construction of boundaries and now we are contributing to the questioning of previous 'bounded' thinking. But let's be clear about boundaries—they were *always* socially rather than physically constructed and the divisions between 'here' and 'there,' 'us' and 'them' was in the mind and the writing of the anthropologist. It was always complicated, and accountability was always an issue." While I would agree that some of the boundaries of "identity" are certainly socially constructed and historically contingent, the boundaries of "power" between those who control economic and political resources and those who are disenfranchised exist beyond the "mind and writing of the anthropologist."
7. Some earlier anthropologists, notably those involved with the "Manchester School" in Africa, studied conflict and conflict resolution (e.g. V. Turner 1957). But Marxist, neo-Marxist, and Foucauldian concerns with the operations of power within societies have made conflict and power central to the theoretical and empirical investigations of many anthropologists.
8. Maasai do not claim to be "first people" as such, since their migration approximately three centuries ago from *endigir e kerio* (the Kerio Escarpment, presumed to be in the north, most likely in Sudan) is central to their history, mythology, and identity (cf. Galaty 1993). Whatever their origins, they believe that they share similar struggles with "first peoples" to protect their distinct culture and their economic and political rights (Murumbi 1994).
9. There is a vast literature covering the topic of Maasai ethnicity. For an overview see Spear and Waller (1993), and Bernstein's (1980) important article on how scholars have themselves created some of the very problems they seek to untangle in terms of tracing the history of the "real" Maasai.

10. Let me be clear that this study, which is only briefly described in this paper, is *not* concerned with determining the “authenticity” of Maasai cultural identities or the merits of their claims to being “indigenous” (cf. Rogers 1996 and reply by Friedman 1996; Field 1996; Mato 1996).
11. I worked for the team from March 1985 through December 1987 throughout Maasai areas in Tanzania. After almost a year working as both the women’s development field worker and the project proposal writer, I was appointed the coordinator of the team. Almost completely comprised of Tanzanians (including some Maasai), the team used participatory problem-posing methods to encourage dialogue, critical awareness, and self-defined development among villagers.
12. Of course, these outcomes are the cumulative effects of the material and discursive practices of numerous individuals. For an analysis of how the actions of one “disobedient” Maasai daughter (cf. Hodgson and McCurdy 1996) reconfigured, however slightly, gendered relations of power in her community, see Hodgson (1996).
13. For an historical examination of the emergence of “development” during the colonial period and its significance in structuring contemporary relations between the Tanzanian nation-state and Maasai peoples, especially in terms of gender and ethnicity, see Hodgson (1995). Elsewhere I analyze how Maasai men negotiate the ambivalent effects of “development” and “modernity” in terms of their masculinities (Hodgson 1999b), as well as examine how some Maasai women at once internalize and express their precarious predicament through spirit possession (Hodgson 1997).
14. For a critical assessment of this project, as well as an overview of related literature, see Hodgson (in press).
15. The first, Korongoro Integrated People Oriented to Conservation (KIPOC), was officially registered under the Tanzanian Societies Ordinance in late 1990; the Maa Pastoralists Development Organization (Inyuat e-Maa), was registered in 1993; and numerous other territorially-based “Maasai” development groups have since been organized (more than ten at last count) (Hodgson nd; Inyuat e-Maa 1991a, 1991b, 1991c, nd; KIPOC 1990, 1991). See Neumann (1995) for an analysis of how the convergence of economic liberalization at the national level and environmental discourses of conservation at the global level have enabled the emergence of these Maasai IDOs. Jim Igoe is completing an important dissertation on these Maasai IDOs for the Department of Anthropology at Boston University.
16. While I am not questioning the ability of elite men or women to represent groups, I am challenging the unquestioned assumption by donors and others that they are “natural” and inherently enlightened representatives (Hodgson nd).

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