# Cultivating
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## Conflict and Collaboration in Natural Resource Management

edited by Daniel Buckles

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## in Natural Resource Management

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Chapter 1

# CONFLICT MANAGEMENT:
# A HETEROCULTURAL PERSPECTIVE

### Jacques M. Chevalier and Daniel Buckles

*Research on community-based natural resource management (CBNRM) has paid little attention to key assumptions it uses in the analysis of conflict and conflict management. The concepts of pacifism, egalitarianism, communalism, secularism, and rationalism are built into the community-based approach to natural resource management and are often treated as universal principles. In this paper, we examine differences in cultural perspectives on these assumptions. We also invite researchers to ground their practice of conflict management in the different social and cultural settings they encounter. Through the use of a conversational style of presentation and reference to cases presented in this volume, we attempt to bring the reader closer to oral forms of community-based politics, learning, and teaching, as an alternative approach to resolving differences in perspectives on the meaning of conflict and conflict management.*

## Boomerang anthropology

**Institute:** Are you familiar with the literature and experiments in the field of CBNRM?

**Anthropologist:** Do you mean the community-based natural resource management approach? Sorry, I hate acronyms, especially this one. It doesn't even have a vowel! Yes, I am familiar with it.

**Institute:** Well, could you help us develop research questions that deal with some of the cultural dimensions of CBNRM?

**Anthropologist:** Sure, I'm good at asking questions. But tell me more.

**Institute:** We think that CBNRM is a good thing, minus the acronym perhaps. For many years, we have supported research and development on means to enhance community-based natural resource management. The basic premise of much of this work is that access to relevant knowledge about resource management options combined with more inclusive decision-making processes can contribute to more equitable and more sustainable natural resource management.

**Anthropologist:** Sounds fine. Where does anthropology fit in?

**Institute:** Our experience shows that conflicts both within and between communities over access to and use of natural resources are significant barriers to CBNRM. We've been looking at recent approaches to conflict management, such as alternative dispute resolution (ADR), for ways to avoid, resolve, or manage conflict over natural resources (Bingham 1986; Shaftoe 1993). Although these new approaches to conflict management are promising, there is a risk that they be uncritically applied to cultural contexts that may require strategies of their own. Our concern is that, in conflict management, cultural differences be taken into account. Why are you laughing?

**Anthropologist:** Actually, it's more ironic than funny. Yours is a boomerang question, the kind that rebounds from answers to previous questions. I am thinking of responses already provided by the ADR literature.

**Institute:** What do you mean?

**Anthropologist:** Avruch and Black (1996) wrote an interesting article on the North American trend toward alternative means of conflict resolution: rent-a-judge, neutral expert fact-finding surveys, mini- or summary jury trials, ombudsman interventions, etc. The trend comprises all paralegal forms of conciliation, facilitation, mediation, or arbitration currently applied to commercial, juvenile, and family law. Reforms to the American justice system go back to the small-claims court movement of earlier decades. They can also be traced to the turmoil of the 1960s and the Federal Mediation and Conciliation Service that came out of the *Civil Rights Act* (1964), a service designed to help communities settle racial and ethnic disputes. These first developments of an alternative justice system were followed in the 1970s by discussions of neighbourhood justice centres and multidoor courthouse options inspired by the dictum: let the forum fit the fuss.

**Institute:** Interesting, but what do these origins have to do with our questions regarding anthropological contributions to conflict resolution?

**Anthropologist:** I was getting there. Avruch and Black (1996) claim that this American "informal justice" movement was influenced by anthropology. It borrowed elements from dispute resolution models originating from tribal societies and used them to promote a peaceful, noncoercive, community-based approach to justice. Richard Danzig's (1973) article, "Toward the creation of a complementary, decentralized system of criminal justice," was particularly influential in this regard. Danzig took some of his inspiration from Gibb's (1963) classic anthropological contribution to the subject matter, "The Kpelle moot: a therapeutic model for the informal settlement of disputes."

**Institute:** Which means we are not the first to ask this kind of question. So much the better!

**Anthropologist:** Anthropology is always a risky venture, though. Danzig's reading of Gibb was not without problems. His article oversimplified the Liberian Kpelle moot system. It neglected real functions, such as assigning blame, demanding apologies, imposing sanctions, and the system's coexistence with formal adjudicative court-like institutions. Incidentally, Abel (1982) and Nader (1980) also critically address the history of the American judicial system reform.

**Institute:** You're saying that alternative approaches to conflict resolution have already used, if not misused, anthropology. If so, should we not try to correct this by seeking "deeper" anthropological insights into conflict resolution?

**Anthropologist:** Yes, of course. But I should warn you that the exercise is not without danger. As Avruch and Black (1996) remark, great caution should be used when borrowing alternative conflict resolution methods from other cultures. Having said that, where do you want to start?

**Institute:** Aaaa ... We don't really know. Where would you start?

**Anthropologist:** Aaaa ... I hate giving answers. What if we looked at the anthropological literature to see what it has to say about this topic?

**Institute:** Fine.

# Ethnoenvironmental politics

**Anthropologist:** There is a long history of anthropological research on indigenous customary laws. The emphasis is usually on interpersonal disputes dealing with issues of land tenure, livestock ownership, inheritance, marriage, and witchcraft accusations. Most case studies are in Africa and, to a lesser extent, Asia.

**Institute:** Can you give us some examples of useful readings in the field?

**Anthropologist:** There is Gluckman's (1955) *The Judicial Process among the Barotse* and his *Politics, Law and Ritual in Tribal Society* (Gluckman 1965), especially chapter 5 which deals with issues of dispute and settlement. I should also mention Evans-Pritchard's (1940) *The Nuer*, Schapera's (1943) *Tribal Legislation among the Tswana of the Bechuanaland Protectorate*, and Paul Bohannan's (1957) *Judgement and Justice among the Tiv*, to name just a few. Barton's (1919, 1949) classic books on the Ifugao and Kalingas of the Philippines give us very good accounts of recorded cases of tribal governance as well.

**Institute:** Should CBNRM practitioners read this literature and see what alternative methods of natural resource conflict management they can borrow?

**Anthropologist:** You could always do that. But I wonder sometimes how useful literature reviews can be. They are a bit like museums. The last thing you want is a compulsory visit to a museum of conflict management practices ossified into showcases and extracted from their living contexts. Alternative methods of conflict management worth exploring are those that are found in the practitioner's research area.

**Institute:** You're suggesting that each CBNRM project should include questions about the particular ways in which disputes and settlements over natural resources are locally or regionally dealt with, outside the formal institutional context?

**Anthropologist:** That's a good way of putting it. CBNRM practitioners can also ask which local conflict management practices are likely to fit into a CBNRM approach and which are not. They could tap into local methods that seem CBNRM-friendly and leave aside those that are not. Alternatively, they could choose to revise CBNRM principles in ways that fit local cultural conditions.

**Institute:** Incidentally, do you know of any catchword we can use to capture this anthropological contribution to alternative, nonlegalistic methods of natural resource conflict management?

**Anthropologist:** Buzzwords do help, don't they? Be careful though. They are like consumer goods — things designed to be fashionable for a while only. Still, how about "ethnoenvironmental politics"? The expression evokes indigenous forms of conflict management that go beyond "official" institutions (track I) and "unofficial" settlement practices (track II) currently proliferating in North America. Ethnoenvironmental politics (EP) would be the acronym; it has a vowel in it.

**Institute:** Sounds a bit academic.

**Anthropologist:** It's not academic, it's "emic," to use Weldon and Jehn's (1996) argument. EP underscores cultural definitions of conflict and conflict resolution behaviour.

**Institute:** Could you give us a sense of the kind of findings that EP might generate?

**Anthropologist:** The list is long. Practices that may be relevant to natural resource conflict management are quite varied. As Castro and Ettenger (1996) explain, they may include peer pressure, gossip, ostracism, violence, public humiliation, theatre, rituals, witchcraft, spiritual healing, kinship alliances, the fragmentation of kin or residential groups, etc.

**Institute:** What about ethno-organizational mechanisms for conflict management?

**Anthropologist:** Here again there is considerable diversity. In Kirinyaga (Kenya), informal meetings of kinsmen might be the place to start. In northern India, the role of hamlet leaders in formal and informal *panchayat* meetings are critical in dealing with conflicts over land (Moore 1993; Wadley 1994). A case can also be made for moots among the Gwembe Tonga in Zambia and the Ndendeuli and Chagga communities in Tanzania (Moore 1986; Gulliver 1971; Colson 1995). More generally, socially organized groups that play a role in EP may comprise kinship units, neighbourhood or village councils, local authorities, age sets, religious groups, ethnic or caste associations, work-related groups, etc. (Yang and Wolfe 1996).

**Institute:** The EP structures you have just listed have been severely eroded by centuries of colonial history though, have they not?

**Anthropologist:** Definitely. For instance, in the Nusa Tenggara region of eastern Indonesia, local kings (*rajahs*), tribal councils, and clan leaders used to exercise effective authority over community land use and forest exploitation. As Fisher et al. (this volume) point out, however, these indigenous forest management systems have been affected by

recent government efforts to impose national regulations on community access and determine forest boundaries and classifications based on technical considerations alone. All the same, we need to know more about traditional mediation methods. The *musyawarah* in Indonesia is a case in point; some of its elements could perhaps be incorporated into public policy related to environmental mediation issues (Moore and Santosa 1995).

# CBNRM assumptions

**Institute:** But what about EP that don't fit in with the CBNRM approach? Should we not try to accommodate them in some way?

**Anthropologist:** I agree; unfriendly EP do pose a problem, but they also raise an interesting question. Could it be that CBNRM has in-built assumptions that are culturally specific and that impose limits on our choice of alternative EP?

**Institute:** Hmmm, doesn't sound good. Do we have to let the spectre of ethnocentrism haunt us all the time? Can't we assume that CBNRM, given its sensitivity to local conditions, will automatically adjust itself to diverse cultural expressions and adaptations? Provided, of course, that the right questions are asked when developing research and pilot projects inspired by this umbrella approach. It's not a recipe. It's a cooking pot, and the final recipe and ingredients are to be selected, weighed, and mixed locally.

**Anthropologist:** I like your metaphor. However, different cooking pots will add different flavours to the dish. Have you ever tasted potatoes cooked in a dirt oven, the way they do it in the Andes?

**Institute:** Okay, then tell us what CBNRM tastes like?

**Anthropologist:** Before I answer your question, I should mention that recently, while in Washington, I did some reading on the life and history of Jefferson.

**Institute:** What does the author of the US Declaration of Independence have to do with our discussion?

**Anthropologist:** Well, our conversation reminds me of some of the things evoked and narrated in the material I read. I have this nagging feeling that a Jeffersonian perspective, understood very broadly, provides what you might call the cultural spirit of CBNRM.

**Institute:** Hmmm. I'm starting to worry that this is going to be longwinded. Could you try to structure your questions and give us concrete examples so that we can use your comments as guidelines for applied research purposes?

**Anthropologist:** I take your point. Let's say we do this in five lessons, each under the rubric of a word that ends with a Jeffersonian "ism," and with illustrations taken from the CBNRM and conflict management literature and some case studies supported by institutes such as yours.

**Institute:** Sounds good. We're all ears.

# Pacifism

**Anthropologist:** One set of questions CBNRM practitioners and researchers should ask themselves when looking at EP has to do with pacifism — the Jeffersonian ideal of peaceful harmony and civility, you might say. Jefferson was not a man of warlike disposition. He struggled to achieve reforms through peaceful means and objected to harsh punishment of the leaders of Shay's Rebellion (1786–87) in Massachusetts. He reduced the military budget and opposed the Alien and Sedition Acts (1798) which threatened the freedom of Americans. Last but not least, Jefferson preferred economic pressure to war in response to British and French violations of American sovereignty during the Napoleonic Wars.

**Institute:** How is this Jeffersonian ideal of peace built into CBNRM?

**Anthropologist:** Conflict management means what it means — that you want to manage conflict in a nonadversarial manner. Socioenvironmental conflict management strategies adopted by CBNRM practitioners are geared to preventing, reducing, or resolving conflicts between people. Peace is an important goal.

**Institute:** Is that a problem? Doesn't everyone want peace?

**Anthropologist:** I do. Like everyone else though, there are other things I value, and finding out how to secure all the good things in life is by no means easy. For instance, justice matters to people, as do material well-being and a healthy environment. The question is whether there might be situations where CBNRM will favour peace at the expense of justice, real improvements in livelihoods, and the conservation of nature.

**Institute:** It is as if CBNRM has to mediate potential conflicts between its own multiple goals.

**Anthropologist:** Correct. To give you an example, Kant and Cooke (this volume) note that the results of community *panchayat* meetings in Madhya Pradesh, India, are not always fair to the weaker parties. Mediators may do everything they can to secure peace but end up with settlements more beneficial to groups wielding the most power.

**Institute:** Peace and equity do not always go hand in hand.

**Anthropologist:** Right. Some leading thinkers in this field, Nader (1990) for instance, would go so far as to say that attempts to integrate informal "tribal" dispute management institutions into modern society are primarily concerned with social control. The end result of apparently well-intended reforms to the justice system is that macrostructural questions of power and inequality are covered with a thick cloak of peace and harmony. Legitimate rights are compromised in a wash of "cultural sensitivity," and plaintiffs are encouraged to consent to "personal growth" therapy through mediation. Meanwhile, profitable jobs go to a new breed of hired "have process, will travel" mediators, missionaries of United States democracy offering a menu of McMediation techniques designed to cool things down across the world (Avruch and Black 1996, pp. 52–53).

**Institute:** Oof … that's a very sombre view of genuine attempts to move away from judicial forms of litigation, is it not?

**Anthropologist:** Yes, but given the world we live in, warnings may be in order. One illusion we should avoid lies in the notion that anthropology necessarily points to things that are external, foreign, and alien to our culture. We ourselves move between different

"cultures" and related practices from within our own social environment. Sometimes and for some of us, the ethos of peace is of paramount importance and other considerations can be treated as important but nonetheless secondary. Other times and for other groups, the ethics of justice, conservation, or material well-being may be a priority instead. Differences mapped along these variable priority lines can be found within and between communities across the world and history as well.

**Institute:** We know of many situations where concerns of livelihood clash with CBNRM goals of sustainable development. I remember a discussion between community-sensitive eco-tourism planners and leaders of a remote Mexican indigenous community. After a trial run with Californian eco-tourists, the planners asked what people intended to do with the money harvested through eco-tourism. "Buy cattle" was the answer. "But what about the forest that would need to be cleared for pasture?," asked a dismayed planner. "Don't worry," answered the noble savages, "We'll leave enough trees along the trail so they don't notice the clearings." Enhancing income and conservation can be such alien concepts!

**Anthropologist:** Another example of this is reported by Fisher et al. (this volume), where the conservation agenda of provincial, regional, and national agencies in Nusa Tenggara, Indonesia, conflict with the development goals of local governments and the Livestock Division of Agriculture Service. Similar stories are legion.

**Institute:** Okay, peace may be at odds with other legitimate goals of CBNRM, but isn't it safe to say that CBNRM cannot be achieved in situations of chaos and war?

**Anthropologist:** Yes and no. The point you make requires some qualification. It may be that the use of force or the threat of force is at times the best way to go if lasting peace is to be secured. Villareal (1996) describes how conflicts over community forests in Latin America often involve large-scale marches, occupation of public buildings, hunger strikes, and alliances with international activist organizations designed to bring governments to the negotiation table. Remember the protest marches of indigenous people from Pastaza and also Beni in Bolivia that involved the detention of senior state officials. In 1995, fishers in the Galapagos Islands threatened to confine tourists and set fire to the national park following a government ban on the sea cucumber fishery (Oveido, this volume). These threats created the conditions needed to bring about a comanagement plan sanctioned by the *Law on the Special Regime for the Province of Galapagos.*

One more example, this time from Africa. We know that the government of Cameroon relies on the revenue generated by foreign logging companies to compensate for declining world prices for its major exports (oil, coffee, cocoa). Given this, can it be expected that the government will freely transfer authority over forest resources to local communities without locals using strong pressure tactics: blockading logging companies and threatening to kidnap expatriate workers (Thomas et al. 1996)?

**Institute:** Environmental politics in Costa Rica seem to support your argument as well. The takeover of Cahuita National Park in 1995 by community actors (Weitzner and Fonseca, this volume) was instrumental in getting the attention of central government bureaucrats in a position to convene multistakeholder negotiations, establish a representative service committee, and appoint qualified members of the community to positions in the park administration.

**Anthropologist:** The lesson is that situations of inequality may force weaker actors to take radical action, sometimes violent, to bring the powers that be to the negotiating table. The challenge is not simply to promote a culture of peace, but rather to ask what conditions are needed for the lion to be brought to the negotiating table with the lamb, as Thomas et al. (1996) aptly put it. It may be that the Spanish–American "ethnoconflict theory" is the right one after all: in some cases, a show of force may be the best way to get attention and real action (Arvuch and Black 1993, p. 139).

**Institute:** The use of force or the threat thereof, as opposed to the force of the better argument.

**Anthropologist:** Well put. CBNRM may foster hopes of optimal congruence between its own goals and the methods proposed to achieve them: in other words, cooperative natural resource management attained through collaborative conflict management methods. Peaceful means to achieve peaceful ends. Conflict settlement is thus pursued through the creation of committees, round tables, user groups, agencies, organizations, alliances, and networks of all sorts that will use incremental and iterative processes of social conversation and mediation to negotiate multiparty win–win options.

**Institute:** A bit like endless rounds of ADR training of Middle Eastern researchers and activists, when the blockage is at the political level. But what about the risk of creating a culture of violence? The Spanish–American model seems to have created the expectation that conflict must turn openly violent before it is taken seriously. The Guatemala Peace Accords following the protracted war between the government and guerilla forces have created spaces for dialogue among indigenous peoples, intellectuals, and government officials that never existed before. But what a cost in human lives and legacy of collective suffering! Furthermore, the Hispanic expectation of violence can work against some native American cultures. The Embera people of Panama have been struggling peacefully against encroachment on their lands by Mestizo settlers for decades. They've been totally ignored by the settlers and the state yet refuse to become violent. Couldn't we say that CBNRM is the ideal strategy to adopt if nonviolent options are to be identified?

**Anthropologist:** I would say so, but only if sensitivity is shown to local EP that may not appear to reflect overt expressions of peace. Some EP may be friendly to CBNRM despite appearances to the contrary. In some cases, getting rid of a conflict may be the last thing you should do.

**Institute:** A bit like political parties constantly fighting in the parliamentary arena but with certain rules and boundaries that are conducive to the exercise of democracy? Or stakeholders using the legal system to challenge positions while spelling out divergent interests and conflicting views on quarrels over natural resources? The implication is that confrontation is not necessarily negative and may be used as a springboard for positive change (Lee 1993)?

**Anthropologist:** Yes. And, in some situations, too much civility might be wasted, whereas a good verbal brawl or show of force will get you closer to the final settlement. Peaceful and well-intentioned CBNRM dispositions can create problems; the road to hell can be paved with good intentions. Some approaches to conflict management may seem friendly enough to all parties concerned yet end up creating new conflicts or exacerbating old ones. This may be the case with joint forest management (JFM) schemes in India, as Chandrasekharan (1996) explains. Decentralization and devolution in the area of forest

management mean a transfer of power aimed at facilitating conflict management. But the entire process can have the opposite result as well: transferring conflicts to the local level (Traore and Lo 1996).

**Institute:** Less peaceful means may yield better results?

**Anthropologist:** Possibly; only research and praxis can tell. The road to heaven can be covered with stones and bricks. In their discussion of mediation in South Africa, Chan et al. (1993) suggest that coercion may play a rational and constructive role in mediation. In a similar vein, Nader and Todd (1978), Nader (1990, 1991), and Schweitzer (1996) challenge the anthropological attachment to models of social harmony, models that ignore the vital role overt disputes play in conflict management and social change. Adversarial behaviour is more in line with a realist view of the Hobbesian international order, a zero-sum game governed by the use of pressure and the deployment of threat and reward tactics.

**Institute:** Can you think of other examples of EP challenges to pacifism?

**Anthropologist:** Take the American approach to conflict management compared with how disputes are handled in the Republic of Palau, a small archipelago in the remote western Pacific. The American assumptions are that parties should leave their guns at the door, sit down, put their cards on the table (after keeping them close to their chest for a while), and treat one another as equals — if only before the law or the ADR mediator. According to Avruch and Black (1996), Palauans do things differently; theirs is a wealth-oriented culture where competition operates at all levels of the social hierarchy. The American legal system implanted in Palauan society since 1944 has been appropriated by Palauans in ways that reflect the rule of tactical politics as opposed to appeals to authority for effective conflict settlement. If not adapted to these local conditions, ADR techniques can lead to disastrous results. In the end, the best strategy may be a two-track or contingent diplomacy approach: applying some of the principles of ADR (empowering weaker parties and focusing on the problem, not the people) while being cautious of the American value system and accepting that some mediations may be guided by competitive manoeuvres and yield contingent outcomes at best.

**Institute:** Many roads can lead to Rome, crooked ones included.

**Anthropologist:** One final example. Traditional measures of land conflict resolution amongst the West Caucasian Abkhazians include child kidnapping. One group kidnaps another group's infant son and adopts it so as to make the two families relatives. The Abkhazian saying is that "blood can be washed away with mother's milk but blood and milk can never be mixed" (Garb 1996). The conflict ends automatically when enemies become relatives — a far cry from the reasonable conflict management techniques advocated in CBNRM.

# Egalitarianism

**Anthropologist:** My second set of research questions has to do with egalitarianism. Remember Jefferson's struggle against aristocracy and his commitment to the ideals of democracy and equality before the law?

**Institute:** You're not going to suggest that CBNRM assumes equality between stakeholders, are you?

**Anthropologist:** Not really. I know that the literature is clear about this. Few researchers and practitioners are naive enough to assume that communities are homogeneous and unstratified. The world is recognized for what it is: a battlefield of conflicts of interests governed by power imbalances. A key strategy advocated in the literature is the empowerment of the weak and the poor. Some CBNRM projects may even recognize the need to exclude some stakeholders from the conflict management process. For instance, the continental fisheries industry was left out of the negotiations that led to the comanagement plan embodied in the *Law on the Special Regime for the Province of Galapagos* (Oviedo, this volume).

**Institute:** So in what way is egalitarianism problematic?

**Anthropologist:** The danger is when equality is presented as a universal imperative, an ideal that should be put into practice whenever the opportunity arises, irrespective of the cultural circumstances of CBNRM practice and variations in EP. Thomas et al. (1996) call it "levelling the playing field: promoting authentic and equitable dialogue under inequitable conditions."

**Institute:** There is a tendency among CBNRM practitioners to ignore or downplay the positive role of specialized knowledge and leadership, including their own, in the management of conflicts. It is as though they are too embarrassed to recognize their own power and the clarity that comes with good leadership. You think this raises important EP questions?

**Anthropologist:** Yes. Westerners tend to view ideal community structures as individuals with equal rights, including the right to be represented by someone of their own like. Farmers don't ask dentists to represent them, nor do Veracruzanos rely on the good services of citizens living in the State of Puebla to represent their views and interests. When CBNRM researchers and practitioners go into the field, they look for ideal groups and communities and their corresponding delegations and representatives, spokespersons usually chosen through mechanisms of collective choice — consensus, elections, nominations by legitimate authorities, procedures, etc. The anthropological question that needs to be raised here is twofold: should the principle of equality and equal representation allow for variations in its cultural expression? and can CBNRM accommodate or even require deviations from this egalitarian ethos?

**Institute:** Those are big questions. Could you be more specific?

**Anthropologist:** Take the two most important EP factors that CBNRM researchers and practitioners are constantly faced with: age and gender. Many CBNRM case studies mention the critical and legitimate role that community elders play in the management of local disputes and natural resources such as land. This is the case amongst the Abkhazians of the Caucasus and the Kpelle of Liberia. CBNRM advocates are realistic and sensitive enough to local authority structures to know that it is those who are the least representative of their communities who will be the best and most legitimate spokespersons for "their people." They typically consist of elderly men or women esteemed for their great wisdom, skills, leadership, and moral authority — qualities deemed to come with age. Respected school teachers and priests or monks may also play a key role in dispute settlement, as in India. Their role is to build, maintain, or restore consensus, as opposed to

representing the interests of a particular community or a majority of voters (Nader 1990; Castro and Ettenger 1996; Chandrasekharan 1996).

**Institute:** Which goes to show that CBNRM can adapt to local EP.

**Anthropologist:** Yes, but most studies also show a concern for the widespread imbalances that exist between men and women, or between the old and the young. The implicit assumption is that wisdom of the elders is tainted with elements of patriarchy or gerontocracy, to be reduced or attenuated through proper participatory methods (Villareal 1996). Defining the stakeholders in a dispute is considered all the more problematic, as some parties — women, youth, the poor — may not be viewed locally as interest groups entitled to be heard in the negotiation process. CBNRM may wish to empower these voices with greater equality in view, yet this may generate new conflicts, as Castro and Ettenger (1996) remark.

**Institute:** You find this ambivalence toward indigenous age and gender EP objectionable?

**Anthropologist:** No, not exactly. The problem is not that we value the role of local authority structures and are suspicious of them at the same time. My suggestion rather is that this ambivalence should be converted from mechanical assumptions into dynamic EP research questions.

**Institute:** How do you do that?

**Anthropologist:** You bracket your own cultural definitions of equality, and you ask questions about local understandings of equality and reciprocity. Unexpected findings may result. Research and practice may lead you to conclude that local forms of differentiation between age and gender and other status differentials based on occupation or kinship may not be endemically contested, socially conflictual, or environmentally maladaptive. If so, local EP may be deemed to be CBNRM friendly. They may constitute functional modes of reciprocity that are alien to Western conceptions of equality and representation but nonetheless compatible with CBNRM practice. For example, among the Aö of Nagaland in northeast India, a village council of male elders determines where community members will be allowed to clear land for cultivation. This ensures that land clearing is concentrated in the same area so that paths can be cut and guarded against raiding, fires can be controlled, and fallow periods can be assured long enough for the land to recover. Conditions for collective work and sustainable land management are created through this gerontocracy (Keitzar 1998).

**Institute:** So CBNRM should adjust to local EP and incorporate flexible conceptions of fairness and equity. But what if you end up concluding that local age and gender EP are CBNRM unfriendly?

**Anthropologist:** Then the problem would have to be researched. What matters in the end is that there be adequate understanding of how power differentials, local and institutional, play themselves out in particular situations of environmental conflict management. Perhaps we should emulate Gambian mediators who do take into account power differentials when negotiating, arbitrating, or adjudicating disputes. They are wise enough to know that there is no single negotiation strategy because "not everyone is the same" (Sheehan 1996).

**Institute:** I presume that not all situations will fall neatly into your CBNRM-friendly and unfriendly categories?

**Anthropologist:** Actually, few will. The Indian literature presents quite a challenge in this regard. Social conflicts are often prevalent in heterogeneous villages where power imbalances based on class, caste, age, gender, tribe, ethnicity, and religion intersect in ways that produce a complex hierarchy of customary and legal–administrative modes of management (Sarin 1996). The hierarchy may be such that silences from the margins will outnumber the official voices that clamour for expression and manage to be heard. Which aspects of Indian EP create favourable conditions and which are a hindrance to CBNRM and can be legitimately challenged from within or without is not a question that can be easily answered.

**Institute:** What would be the consequences of inadequate understanding of the role of power differentials in CBNRM practice?

**Anthropologist:** That's another empirical question. One possible effect is that CBNRM may forego some useful conflict management opportunities because of its out-of-hand rejection of apparently unfriendly EP. Another consequence is that equality may be prioritized and promoted to the point of creating new local conflicts that jeopardize other legitimate pursuits of CBNRM, such as sustainable land use. Conversely, insufficient research might lead some apparently friendly practices to be incorporated at great cost, that is, reinforcing power differentials and inequities. Finally, a misunderstanding of power differentials may result in CBNRM projects being merrily co-opted by the powers that be.

We know that national governments can create community-level arbitration forums of their own, sometimes under the guise of decentralization. The *salish* in Bangladesh and *gram panchayat* in India are indigenous forums that are incorporated into the state system. Research has shown that they can be dominated by local power structures favouring the wealthy and the politically connected and excluding the interests of women and the poor (Castro and Ettenger 1996; Kant and Cooke, this volume). The village development boards of Nagaland were modeled on traditional village councils of some tribes but come into conflict with governance structures of other tribes.

# Communalism

**Institute:** You have just debunked two monumental principles: pacifism and egalitarianism. Are we heading toward yet another exposé on the virtues of cultural relativism? The kind that justifies total inaction and tolerance toward all forms of social organization, from outright machismo to extreme forms of social stratification? Isn't there a risk that CBNRM will reach total paralysis as it seeks maximum sensitivity to the diversity of value systems and cultural forms of life?

**Anthropologist:** Yours is an either–or, black-or-white question. My point is not that we should be willing to compromise our beliefs and commitment to a peaceful and equitable management of natural resource conflicts. Rather, the point is that researchers and practitioners working in contexts that are often multicultural should be open to complex and unexpected forms of CBNRM-compatible practices that do not conform to ready-made recipes of Western inspiration.

**Institute:** Fine. What's your next Jeffersonian "ism"?

**Anthropologist:** I call it communalism, for want of a better word. As in community-based natural resource management. Not that Jefferson advocated community-based modes of governance; the Jeffersonian parallel doesn't work all that well in this case. Mind you, Jefferson devoted a lot of his time to farm and family. Also, he was an advocate for self-governance for America under British rule and for the western territories.

**Institute:** Is "communalism" another problem? Is your point going to be that communalism belongs to a culturally specific value system that should not be spread around the world via CBNRM? Or, better still, are you going to say that you're not against the idea, provided that it be problematized and subjected to EP analysis?

**Anthropologist:** No. This time I think CBNRM is in trouble. The concept of community creates serious problems.

**Institute:** Pity. If you drop the concept of community, are you not jeopardizing the underlying notion that the decision-making process in the field of environmental management should be inverted from top down to bottom up? Decentralization is embedded in this concept.

**Anthropologist:** I understand. But could it be that social scientists have committed a grave error in fostering this "community" view of life in society? The term *community* usually assumes two things: first, a group delimited by distinctively recognizable boundaries; second, an identity constituted by what is shared between members located inside those boundaries. What if social relations worked exactly the opposite way — that is, the inside would consist essentially of two things: relations between those deemed to be different and exchanges with the outside world? What if life in society was neither monocultural (the idea that each society has a culture of its own) nor multicultural (the idea that we all live in multiethnic and pluralistic environments)? What if the rule was rather heterocultural or heterosocial — social life thrives on intercourse between those considered different?

**Institute:** Did you say "heterocultural"? Never heard of the word.

**Anthropologist:** I don't like acronyms, but I do have this habit of manufacturing words.

**Institute:** How does heteroculturalism work in real-life situations?

**Anthropologist:** Take the Sudanese Nuba. They are Nuba for several reasons. First, not because of what they have in common, but rather because of the particular ways in which they establish differences and relations between villages and lineages, the young and the old, men and women, people and land, plants and animals, humans and spirits. Second, they are Nuba because they know not who they are but rather who they are not: namely, the neighbouring Baggara who construct differences and relations differently. Nubaness points to how the Nuba do not do things the Baggara (or the Jellaba) way. Third, the Nuba are Nuba not because they don't mingle with the Baggara, but rather because of the intercourse that binds and sustains the two "communities": real commerce, intermarriages, etc. At the heart of Nuba identity lies a long history of trade and politics linking the Nuba and the Baggara, hence interdependence across the ethnic divide. To give you just one example of this, there used to be a time when each Baggara subtribe defended its respective Nuba hills and allies so as to secure supplies of grain and slaves as well (Suliman, this volume).

**Institute:** How does this discussion of Nubaness illustrate the idea of heteroculturalism?

**Anthropologist:** It means that the Nuba identity lies in a web of negotiated differences and relations, internal and external. It's as if the differential fluids exchanged and circulating within and between the two bodies, the Nuba and the Baggara, determined the shape and anatomy of each group. Note also that these fluids are in constant motion, something that the concept of identity tends to hide. The Nuba are Nuba not because of static attributes that can be assigned to them but rather because of convoluted stories moving through time: the fluids of social history.

**Institute:** Your notion of heterocultural identity formation sounds "sexy." Yet we know that not all zones and exchanges of the body social are erogenous. Some are covered with wounds suffered at the hands of other groups. Less metaphorically, the Nuba history of relations with other groups includes stories of slavery and repression verging on genocide.

**Anthropologist:** I was getting there. Notice the term I was using, *relations*, which may range from commerce and marriage to invasion and armed conflict. All such relations, be they cooperative or conflictual, play a direct role in histories of shifting identities. Without outside interaction, it is unlikely that Nubaness would have been recognized as a distinct cultural identity. The Nuba comprise more than 50 dialect groups who share most of all a common history of Turkish and British invasions, Jellaba domination, and slave-raids at the hands of the Baggara previously roaming the plains of Kordofan and Darbur. Nineteenth-century raids have forced them to retreat into the Nuba mountains; territorial identity is never a simple matter of a group choosing its habitat independent of outside forces. Without this common destiny vis-à-vis external forces, the boundaries of Nuba identity and territory would be meaningless. Even the term *Nuba* has been imposed from outside and is used mostly in reference to the non-Nuba world. Ethnicity is never merely an internal construction; it's also a response to external actions and definitions.

**Institute:** Hasn't this Nuba identity been severely eroded through recent population movements and increased contact with other ethnic groups through urban migration? If so, wouldn't that contradict your "heterocultural" thesis?

**Anthropologist:** On the contrary. Urbanization is affecting the Nuba way of life, but mostly in the sense of making constructions of ethnicity more rigid than ever. People are pigeon-holed into ethnic categories, which means that "culture" is artificially disembedded from other aspects of social life. According to Suliman (this volume), the Nuba have thus further "discovered" their Nubaness through the diaspora; life in the towns of the Sudan and expressions of northern Arab arrogance toward non-Arab Southerners and Westerners have reduced Nuba cultural diversity to a single, second-class Nuba identity.

**Institute:** Yours is a different way of seeing "community constructions" that may be insightful, but is this not an academic exercise?

**Anthropologist:** Not really. One implication of this argument is that the history of social sciences has in common with colonial and neocolonial politics a propensity to divide or reorganize populations into apparently homogeneous national, ethnic, or linguistic groups. People are slotted into island-like entities that hide the interaction and movements occurring across boundaries. Communities constructed as biological-like organisms classifiable like genera and species are partly an offshoot of an academic discourse that may feed into strategies of domination and war. The end result is a hierarchical and conflictual sort of heteroculturalism that hides under a thick cloak of "tribalism" — people fighting apparently because they cannot tolerate their differences.

**Institute:** Would this argument apply to official accounts of the 10-year-old war between the Nuba and the Baggara?

**Anthropologist:** Precisely. As you know, wars in Africa are often explained away as ethnic conflicts or wars of religion and tribal identity. As Suliman (this volume) argues, the problem is not so much that the explanation is false, which it is. Rather, the problem is that the explanation tends to make things worse, fueling the conflict as it were, and not without intent. Up until the 1980s the Nuba and the Baggara were relatively at peace with one another; since then, they have been at war. The civil war that broke out in 1983 led the Arab Jellaba government and eventually the National Islamic Front to repress the Nuba-led opposition party called the Sudan National Party and also to arm the Murahaliin militia and the Baggara nomads against Nuba communities and the Sudanese Popular Liberation Army roaming in the rebel-friendly Nuba mountains. Faced with problems of overgrazing and persistent droughts, the Baggara used this opportunity to raid Nuba communities and dispossess them of their land. However, these raids have most benefited the Jellaba government and a minority of land-hungry Jellaba farmers and absentee landlords intent on introducing large-scale mechanized farming into the region. Needless to say, the official account of the Nuba–Baggara war is quite different and revolves around issues of "difference." While they actively supported the Baggara war against the Nuba, landlords and the government have fueled the conflict by treating it as an outburst of tribalism, or a Jihad Holy War against the non-Islamic Nuba.

**Institute:** Couldn't we say that this case study is a good example of stakeholder analysis, which happens to be a standard tool in CBNRM and related conflict management practice?

**Anthropologist:** You might say that. But the case study also teaches us that stakeholder analysis is better done with an understanding of "community" that stresses its heterocultural origins and functions, be they cooperative or conflictual. By the way, the experience in Nam Ngum, Lao PDR, is another illustration of how useless the notion of a common interest and stable, long-standing community structure can be (Hirsch et al., this volume). The Nam Ngum River watershed area is the site of many social divisions, creating factional competition between regional and national livelihoods, local and external claimants to forest and water resources, subsistence and commercial producers, village residents and settlers, communities with different ethnic compositions, upland and lowland production systems, and so on.

**Institute:** Let's say we buy into your notion of heteroculturalism. How does it affect the research agenda dealing with environmental conflict?

**Anthropologist:** Three things. First, when doing stakeholder analysis, you can ask questions not only about things that members of a "community" have in common, but also what they do not share and yet binds them together through ongoing relations, cooperative or conflictual. Second, the same question applies to members of different communities and interest groups: intercourse between "communities" is as binding as resemblance and similarities. Questions regarding heterosocial movements across community boundaries, be they defined as localities or communities of interests, matter as much as straightforward community affiliations. During the last century, the Miskito drove the Sumo into the upper reaches of the great floodplain of the Atlantic coast of Nicaragua and Honduras. Interaction during the Contra war transformed this relationship, leading to the formation of a common political body seeking to establish their rights to territory in the newly declared reserve of Bosawas. Finally, social change is at the heart of identity formation.

Where people and groups wish to go matters as much as where they come from. History is full of dreams and aspirations either frustrated or partly satisfied by courses of events. Take these dreams and fears away, and you have rigid cultural identities, or the appearance thereof.

**Institute:** Can you think of any stakeholder terminology that captures your last point?

**Anthropologist:** The notion of a playing field is the closest I can think of. A playing field means people play. Games are of no interest if the players and their respective positions remain the same throughout the game. Change is all the more inevitable as people typically play many different games and occupy multiple positions that vary through time.

**Institute:** Could you give us other examples of the negative consequences of using more conventional notions of community?

**Anthropologist:** The management of gender differences offers a good example of how mechanical notions of "community boundaries" can be harmful. On one hand, CBNRM practitioners cannot simply assume that men and women belonging to the same community must share and occupy the same participatory rural appraisal forums, for the greater glory of equality without difference. On the other hand, they cannot presume that each gender forms a distinct "community of interests," to be recognized and treated as such through separate "representations." Relations and flows within and between genders will vary from one social environment to another and call for conflict management strategies that eschew "simple community" recipes.

**Institute:** Should we not simply trust the parties concerned to identify strategic "community" boundaries?

**Anthropologist:** Not necessarily. Take the Mexican Gulf Nahua battle for communal land ownership fought throughout the 1970s and early 1980s. The media treated the battle as a struggle for the preservation of cultural identity and traditional community heritage against the redistribution of parcels of land (following the *ejido* model) and the encroachment of the government-owned oil industry. In reality, however, the "native community battle" story was fed to the press by native cattle ranchers who were in control of municipal and communal land-tenure institutions (Chevalier and Buckles 1995). Observers who bought the "communal" interpretation, pitting the whole Nahua village against the expropriation or redistribution of land, played into the native cattle-rancher strategy. They fell into the trap of assuming that customary resource-allocation and conflict-settlement institutions had not been distorted by centuries of colonial and postcolonial history involving market forces, state bureaucracies, and broader national politics.

**Institute:** Your response is intriguing. You argue that local accounts of conflicts cannot always be taken at face value. But your evocation of colonial and postcolonial history suggests that communities might be less divided and better off if they were left on their own, without outside intervention, in keeping with CBNRM philosophy. Could it not be that natural resource conflicts stem essentially from a relative lack of community autonomy vis-à-vis outside forces?

**Anthropologist:** You're opening up another can of worms. Heterocultural polity is not merely a horizontal phenomenon. It also points to vertical relations between the "inside" and "outside," interactions that are constitutive of community life and history. CBNRM itself is an illustration of flows and movements across vertical boundaries. Let's face it,

CBNRM would never capture any institutional imagination were it not for some third party promoting or facilitating its practice. More often than not, the intervention occurs in response to a request for assistance or some regional, national, or international imperative to be protected, be it conservation, democracy, or structural adjustment.

The request or intervention is all the more needed as externalities are built into how localities and communities of interests are structured and come to be. The end product of this outside intervention may be a government actually taking leadership in CBNRM. This is the case with the Philippines, where an Executive Order passed in October 1997 required no less than 800 coastal municipalities to formulate comprehensive development plans to be used in designing national fishery ordinances. To be fair, the order took some of its inspiration from the experience of the Multisectoral Committee on Coastal Development Planning instituted in the municipality of Bolinao, Pangasinan (Talaue-McManus et al., this volume).

**Institute:** So local autonomy is a misleading concept?

**Anthropologist:** I would say so. Take the Indonesian case study (Fisher et al., this volume). We know that boundary disputes over agricultural lands between villages and communities in Indonesia used to be resolved at the local level, through the intervention of local leaders and without outside assistance. It is only when government and business enter the picture that a pitch has to be made, often with the support of third parties, for decentralization and community devolution entailing comanagement arrangements.

In Nepal, institutions charged with managing natural resource conflicts evolving at the community level include bilateral agencies, the Department of Forests, the Department of National Parks and Wildlife Management, legal associations such as the Nepal Bar Association, propublic and multidisciplinary groups such as Nepal Madhyashata Samuha, and nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) such as Women Acting Together for Change (Chandrasekharan 1996). When you look at the Nepalese and Indonesian experiences in CBNRM, community-based management is a bit of a misnomer.

**Institute:** The notion that externalities are built into community structures and histories and should be part of CBNRM practice is part of your heterosocial or heterocultural concept?

**Anthropologist:** Yes, and the implications are many. For one thing it means community traditions are never simple; nor are they static. Social transformations over the last two centuries are particularly significant in this regard. In Indonesia, the implementation of government policies and the growth of national bureaucracies have severely affected the authority of tribal councils and microleadership structures. Nowadays, the government appoints village administrators, imposes laws and procedures, runs an educational system of its own design, and facilitates the expansion of markets and migratory movements. All of this has generated tensions not only between local and national institutions but also between local constituencies (Fisher et al., this volume).

**Institute:** Given these inevitable ties between micro- and macrolevel processes, we might be better off using the term *comanagement* instead of *community-based management* (McCay 1998; Uphoff 1998).

**Anthropologist:** Comanagement is a useful concept, indeed. The term captures what Quebec government resource managers are attempting to do when they treat community tallymen and the Cree Trapper Association as their co-equals, in keeping with stipulations

of the James Bay and Northern Quebec Agreement. Tallymen are recognized hunting leaders who rely on kinship ties, reciprocity, and personal influence to exercise authority over activities performed on their traplines and to settle disputes when they arise (Feit 1989). Take also CBNRM in India. We know that Indian community systems of forest management underwent profound transformations during British rule. More recently, JFM schemes have been created and adopted in 25 Indian states. They involve the forest department and local communities organized into forest protection committees and village forest protection committees.

**Institute:** You should know that institutional partnership between local and external institutions is not without difficulties, though. Local committees include all *panchayat* officials elected every 5 years. But they also comprise a resident teacher, women, and landless people, many of whom tend to be young and find themselves competing with the *panchayat's* traditional role in conflict mediation. Lack of complementarity between institutions can be a problem (Chandrasekharan 1996; Kant and Cooke, this volume).

**Anthropologist:** Still, comanagement goals are worth pursuing. The Indonesian experience in CBNRM offers promises of a collaborative, comanagement strategy that combines horizontal and vertical linkages. One important lesson of the Nusa Tenggara Uplands Development Consortium is that the management of forest and conservation disputes requires a multicommunity, interinstitutional approach, hence new alliances built across traditional political and cultural boundaries. The consortium comprises all stakeholders: villages adjacent to the protected areas, NGO leaders, researchers and scientists committed to conservation and community development, and district and provincial officials from key government agencies.

**Institute:** In short, your argument is that we should be concerned not so much with community autonomy as with real collaboration between concerned parties. Still, isn't there a danger that comanagement principles may serve to justify top-down limits on community-based management activity?

**Anthropologist:** Perhaps, but comanagement can also be enabling. CBNRM practitioners might wish to persuade government institutions, multinationals, and large national industries to yield to the wiser ways of community-based management of natural resources and related conflicts. A better strategy, however, would be to promote the economic and political empowerment of weaker "communities" within broader social systems, with upward links enabling communities to affect broader policies. Structurally adjusting governments may opt to transfer natural resource rights and responsibilities over fully autonomous communities but without transferring anything else — no financial resources; no credit or marketing assistance; no technical support; and no protective legislation against local merchants, landowners, lumber bosses, multinational pulp and paper companies, the oil industry, or commercial farmers. If so, autonomy and decentralization add up to pure rhetoric. CBNRM is doomed to failure if there is no real sharing of costs and benefits between micro- and macrolevels, as Uphoff (1998) suggests.

**Institute:** But village forest reserves and community-based management plans would never have seen the light in the Babati District of Tanzania had it not been for Tanzania's national policy of decentralization and corresponding effort to reduce government costs in forest management (Thomas et al. 1996)?

**Anthropologist:** Decentralization *does* create new opportunities for community management. But it can also lead to the greater weight of market forces and increased concentration in the hands of the few. In the absence of comanagement policies and structures, anything can happen.

**Institute:** Your research questions regarding the concept of community are most relevant. But we're not entirely convinced by your anthropologic critique of "communalism." Can there not be CBNRM-friendly adaptations of the conventional "community" rhetoric?

**Anthropologist:** Perhaps. After all, a good heterocultural story that produces worthwhile results doesn't have to be true, does it? Shoring up some "authentic community" story that seeks to preserve a commonly shared identity can serve a worthwhile cause. When you think of it, the Honduran Chortis gained a lot from the anthropologic documentation of their indigenousness and preservation of the Maya way of life. Rivas (1993) contradicted the Copán landowner view that the Chortis should not be recognized as a native people, given everything they have lost, including their language and other external features of "native" life (for example, traditional clothes). The landowner view was not without political motivation: the implication was that the Chortis should not be eligible to seek land ownership, in accordance with Honduras' Agreement 169 signed under the presidency of Carlos Roberto Reina (1994–97) (Chenier et al., this volume).

Who knows, fictions of well-preserved identities could bring further benefits through the expansion of tourism in Copán, an important archeological site. The Chortis could alleviate their subsistence problems by packaging themselves as interpretive commodities for the tourist industry. Landowners and merchants might gain from the growth of Copán tourism currently under their control. Peace could be restored, and some further land concessions could be secured by the Chortis. The net "Copán community" benefits would be enhanced if local cultural tourism, a heterocultural phenomenon in its own right, were done intelligently, the CBNRM way. Everything is possible.

**Institute:** Are you suggesting that communalism can be CBNRM friendly under conditions that need further specification? If so, it sounds like an acceptable compromise.

**Anthropologist:** Fiction can pay off — it's called "strategic essentialism" — as long as researchers and actors keep asking themselves whether the dream is not about to turn into a nightmare.

**Institute:** Point well taken.

# Secularism

**Anthropologist:** But we're not finished, are we? Now comes the fourth "ism": secularism.

**Institute:** Are you referring to the separation of State and Church, as fathered by Jefferson via his bill on religious freedom introduced in Virginia?

**Anthropologist:** Yes. But more importantly, the extirpation of religion from economics and politics.

**Institute:** Are preachers of Greenpeace, animal rights, and Gaïa politics about to knock at our door?

**Anthropologist:** I'm afraid so. But I promise to be brief and to offer relevant CBNRM adaptations of the Gaïa research agenda.

**Institute:** Not to worry. Ours is a serious institution, which means we are open to alternative views of nature. We firmly believe there is a lot to be learned from indigenous attitudes toward the universe. We too are heteroculturals!

**Anthropologist:** Some of my questions you will therefore anticipate. It takes no great imagination to suggest that CBNRM researchers and practitioners should ask questions about how some people view other life forms as stakeholders in their own right, to be listened to in the appropriate forums and through adequate mediation. Sensitivity is to be shown to the role of religious leaders, sorcerers, healers, animals, plants, and spirits in the management of natural resource activities and related disputes between humans and between life forms.

**Institute:** Could you give us examples of concrete observations that can be made in the field and that pertain to the religious aspects of environmental management and related dispute settlements?

**Anthropologist:** Of course. In Africa, connections between natural resource management activities and Islamic laws of inheritance can be crucial to CBNRM planning (Sheehan 1996). When pursuing dispute settlements, Gambians resort not only to customary laws and legal statues, but also to Islamic laws; forum shopping crosses the divide between secular and religious institutions and belief systems (Sheehan 1996). In Tonga, Christian congregations have been shown to play a critical role in local conflict management (Olson 1993). In the Nusa Tenggara region of Indonesia there is a strong spiritual motivation for land and forest management practices; numerous forest sites are still regarded as sacred, and traditional restrictions on exploring these areas are still upheld (Fisher et al., this volume). All these examples converge in one lesson: religion and religious institutions do matter.

**Institute:** Given these considerations, should we not be conscious of the limitations of such terms as *natural resources* and their *management* by human beings? Should we not seek alternative, less anthropocentric terms that address the intercourse of nature and culture, terms that are less secular and may enhance the local sustainability of CBNRM?

**Anthropologist:** Definitely. Culture's relationship with nature is heterocultural in its own right, a playing field where CBNRM can learn from indigenous knowledge systems that speak to the complex interdependencies that tie humans to all life forms, perceived or imagined.

**Institute:** Do you think that research questions pertaining to "land ethic" values should be built into CBNRM, as McCay (1998) proposes? Or should we simply let local actors add whatever EP interpretation or translation they deem relevant to their CBNRM practice? The Ojibway of central Canada, for example, may include a chair at formal meetings on land issues with government officials for "the seventh generation to come" and discuss what that person might say before making decisions.

**Anthropologist:** There is no simple answer to that question. It's the question that matters, to be answered differently from one context to another. In some cases, outside efforts to translate everything into local cultural belief systems can result in overengineering and downright demagogy. In other cases, institutions and NGOs that neglect to ask questions

about native EP rituals and cosmologies may send a clear message, wittingly or not: use our "managerial" language, scale it down to your community level if need be, forget your superstitions, or keep your idiosyncratic beliefs to yourselves. "Locals" should keep religion out of CBNRM or be discreet about it.

**Institute:** Can we safely assume that CBNRM concessions to some ecocentric Gaïa EP will automatically bring dividends? Sorry, we mean raise all spirits to a higher plane of environmental consciousness?

**Anthropologist:** Certainly not. We know too well that the playing field of humans having intercourse with gods can produce all sorts of secular alliances. Advocates of Jellaba Islam may call upon the Baggara to invade Nuba land and massacre its inhabitants. African peasants may convert to Pentecostalism and struggle against the cult of animals and forest sites. The Christian hierarchy may invite followers all over the world to renounce animism and paganism. A Mexican community leader known to offer healing ritual services may happen to be the local *cacique*, a relatively wealthy rancher, or the mayor's brother. While we're at it, mention could be made of sectarian divisions in rural communities of Northern Ireland, an issue somewhat neglected in British contributions to social anthropology (Moore and Sanders 1996). In short, spirituality is never simply neutral; nor is it always socially or environmentally enlightened.

# Rationalism

**Institute:** Religion can be a touchy subject. Could that explain the conspicuous absence of discussions of religious matters in the CBNRM literature?

**Anthropologist:** That's one reason. But there is an even deeper reason: the notion that rational management strategies should be applied to natural resource activities. Which brings me to our fifth "ism": rationalism, the last assumption on my hit list. By it, I mean reason applied to natural resource management issues and deployed in ways that are predominantly utilitarian, analytic, logical, and contractual. You might call this "environmental rationalism."

**Institute:** That's a mouthful!

**Anthropologist:** Please bear with me. Let's start with the utilitarian approach, an attitude that emphasizes things and activities that are useful. Doing useful things and seeking rational, methodical ways of attaining environmental management goals are part and parcel of CBNRM. Vernooy and Ashby (this volume) put considerable emphasis on the organizational principles of CBNRM and local capacity-building for monitoring and planning resource use.

**Institute:** You think this assumption should be problematized, anthropologically speaking?

**Anthropologist:** Yes, in two different ways. First, by looking at cultural differences in perceptions of goals and related means assigned to their attainment. Second, by asking ourselves how much energy and time people are willing to devote to these rational activities, as distinct from crazier things people also engage in.

**Institute:** How are these assumptions embedded in CBNRM?

**Anthropologist:** Patience! We need to address two other facets of reason before we proceed to more concrete illustrations. Analytic logic is one of them: organizing our thoughts into discreet categories, writing, and measurements, if possible, and putting them into some sequential order. When combined with a utilitarian attitude, reasoning of this kind is conducive to cost–benefit analysis of ends and means to achieve them. Left-brain stuff.

**Institute:** You're not going to give us an exposé on the lessons of right-brain thinking for CBNRM and the management of related conflicts, are you?

**Anthropologist:** No, unless you keep interrupting me! The third and final aspect of reason is what might be called contractualism: reaching formal agreement through an exchange of logical arguments leading to some exercise of free choice by all parties concerned, usually with legalistic implications.

**Institute:** All of these assumptions seem so reasonable. Our view is that reason is badly needed in dealing with problems of massive destruction and pervasive conflicts in the field of natural resource management. Actually, mismanagement would a better word to describe what usually happens.

**Anthropologist:** I agree. But we also need to consider other cultural responses to problems of environmental degradation. Comparing such views with our own rational value system is bound to offer new insights into the cultural waters we swim in; fish are reputed to have a hard time recognizing water for what it is.

**Institute:** The principles you've just outlined were embedded into Jeffersonian philosophy?

**Anthropologist:** Yes, to the extent at least that Jefferson was both father and child of the modern era, which he was in several ways. Jefferson studied law and advocated natural rights theory. He attempted to modernize the curriculum of the College of William and Mary and to create a public library and a free system of tax-supported elementary education. Modern education was so important to him that he considered the creation of the University of Virginia to be one of his greatest accomplishments. Moreover, he supported the use of the decimal system, which led to the adoption of the dollar in 1792. On the economic side of things, Jefferson helped negotiate international commercial treaties while in Paris. Finally, the man experimented with new agricultural technologies and even built a nail factory. Although certainly not committed to a conservation or sustainable development philosophy, Jefferson had faith in the virtues and powers of education, science, and reason.

**Institute:** How are these premises problematic from an anthropological perspective? Doesn't utilitarianism provide us with tools essential to the management of scarce natural resources and the legitimate satisfaction of human needs, however they may be defined?

**Anthropologist:** Yes, assuming that you're swimming in the right waters. But what if the terms you just used did not capture the lifeworld other people live in? What if natural resources did not exist as "natural resources," that is, as objects and life forms devoid of spirituality and intentionality? Could it be that other cultures do not conceive of things and bodies that can be thrown into the "purely physical" universe we call nature? What happens to CBNRM practice when faced with African or native American cultures that speak a language of zoning and ecology alien to our "natural resource" perspective? Shouldn't the CBNRM language adjust accordingly (Henshaw Knott 1993)?

**Institute:** But surely words like *nature* and *resource* are no more than words, empty shells that can be filled with different contents and belief systems?

**Anthropologist:** Not really. Words are symptomatic of attitudes and behaviour expressed toward things that surround us. The impact of nature conceived as a vast reservoir of material means to satisfy human wants has been discussed at great length by anthropologists and ecologists and should not be underestimated. Nor should the insights offered by other cultural perspectives on "nature" be ignored in CBNRM practice. In conventional economic terms, we might say that there are real cultural costs to models that seek universal applications of rational cost–benefit analysis and the value system of capital. Paradoxically, utilitarianism is an expensive proposition (Hanna 1998).

**Institute:** But CBNRM is deeply committed to sustainable development goals and the preservation of nature for future generations. It takes the origins of the word *resource* most seriously, from the old French word *resourare*, to arise anew: *re-* means again, *sourdre* is to spring up as water, from Latin *surgere*, to arise. This concern with letting nature "arise anew" radically departs from all endeavours to harness the environment to our immediate needs. It is also generally compatible with other cultural perspectives on nature.

**Anthropologist:** Again, I beg to disagree. The goals you speak of are commendable and represent a new perspective on our relationship to Mother Nature. Still, sustainability finds its source of inspiration in reason. It elevates rational behaviour to a higher plane, so to speak, namely, entire "communities of interests" exercising "social choices," hopefully to the benefit of future generations and the whole of humanity. This is a challenge to models of unregulated individuals preoccupied with their personal well-being alone, which is what Hardin's theory of the "tragedy of [free access to] the commons" used to assume (Ostrom 1998). Nevertheless, sustainability is generally pursued without a voice being granted to spirits and other life forms dwelling in nature. The concept still evolves within the orbit of Western reason.

**Institute:** Your point brings us back to the issue of secularism and religion, does it not?

**Anthropologist:** Yes.

**Institute:** The utilitarian attitude also ties in directly with the imperatives of logic and analytic problem-solving, *a priori*, that are by no means culture-free (Avruch and Black 1993). CBNRM practitioners rarely ask critical questions about the managerial assumptions that underlie their work.

**Anthropologist:** That is unfortunate. Actually, with the utilitarian and managerial assumptions come a whole range of methodologic prescriptions that are part and parcel of CBNRM. Take prescriptions of "clarity" for instance. Logic tends to have little tolerance for ambiguity and confusion, to say the least. What if, instead of stressing maximum dissonance reduction, CBNRM were to make some concessions to chaos theory, as do many people in cultural settings other than our own? By the way, this is what Pederson (1995) suggests in his discussion of non-Western concepts of multicultural conflict management as applied to migration issues.

**Institute:** How would chaos theory affect CBNRM practice?

**Anthropologist:** For one thing the boundaries of communities and stakeholder groups might become fuzzier, with gray zones and overlaps that introduce muddles into models

of social reality. Expectations that rival parties clearly define their interests and goals and focus on the task at hand, doing things step by step and leaving all other considerations aside, might have to be revisited as well.

**Institute:** But rational management methods do require that issues and boundaries be clearly analyzed and handled with efficiency, through proper dialogues and with definite plans and deadlines to be followed and adjusted according to needs.

**Anthropologist:** Don't get me wrong. The methods you describe are powerful tools and do work, given the right conditions. Setting up village forest reserves in Tanzania meant that stakeholders, representatives, and group interests (distinct or shared) had to be identified; problems and alternative solutions adequately circumscribed and prioritized from different perspectives; technical and social information gathered and distributed; risks of failure and success realistically assessed; links to national decentralization policies explored; preliminary contractual agreements recorded and later sanctioned by law; minuted meetings and follow-up activities scheduled and structured with enough time devoted to each phase; and ground rules established from the start. And everything had to be done under the neutral guidance of properly trained mediators and facilitators (Thomas et al. 1996). Practically all of these step-by-step procedures were used in the development of comanagement plans in Cahuita, Costa Rica (Weitnzer and Fonseca Borrás, this volume) and in the Galapagos as well (Oviedo, this volume).

**Institute:** Which goes to show that people can behave rationally and with some success!

**Anthropologist:** True enough. But what if cultural and historical circumstances required different strategies?

**Institute:** Then we would look for local codes of behaviour and try to adjust CBNRM practice accordingly.

**Anthropologist:** So would I. Two caveats, though. First, the notion that people follow fixed codes is a corollary of analytic logic. As Colson (1995) and Castro and Ettenger (1996) argue, the danger with studies of "other cultural codes" is that we ignore the ambiguities and dynamic chaos built into local "norms of conduct"; the risk is that we understand and apply these codes more rigidly than community members normally would. Second, what if local rules were downright CBNRM unfriendly in some important respects?

**Institute:** For example?

**Anthropologist:** Let's say people were not inclined to talk about conflicts, preferring instead to speak of gossip, fuss, imbroglios, or problems that need "fixing," as in Costa Rica (Lederach 1992). Would CBNRM work if cultural norms discouraged people from converting latent conflicts into public disputes (Uphoff 1998)? What if rival parties were practically illiterate and had no knowledge of methodic management practices and little familiarity with the legalities and administrative implications of CBNRM? Or if only young men had such skills, to the exclusion of elders customarily responsible for the settlement of disputes, as among pastoralists in Mali (Verdeld 1994)? What if people preferred to handle disputes not quickly and straightforwardly but rather slowly, obliquely, with arguments that wander off in all directions? Can rational management activities do without the use of written law and allow instead for a generous deployment of proverbial sayings, oathtaking, praying, embracing, feasting or gift-giving, as in Nusa Tenggara?

**Institute:** Reason would compel us to research these questions before undertaking a CBNRM project.

**Anthropologist:** If so, other questions would also follow. For instance, how would natural resource conflicts be managed in a context where traditional mediation strategies consist of a marathon of emotional outbursts aimed at dissipating strong feelings, as among the Malaysian Semai (Avruch and Black 1993; Robarchek and Robarchek 1993)? What if the eloquence, humour, or wisdom of an elderly Gikuyu man or Abkhazian mediator mattered more than his ability to facilitate a dialogue? Or if the mediatory abilities of a northern Zapotec compadre, a Tanzanian Ndendeuli notable, or an Indian and northern Somali lineage leader stemmed not so much from the person's impartiality as from his or her capacity to play on his or her links with the parties in conflict? How does CBNRM adjust to situations where trust is the key factor, as among the Arusha of Tanzania, who use lineage and age-set institutions to settle local disputes and court procedures for disputes with untrustworthy strangers (Gulliver 1971; Nader 1990; Colson 1995)?

**Institute:** We agree that methods of environmental conflict management should not be culturally disembedded (McCay 1998). Does this mean, however, that local methods of conflict management should always be preferred over standard CBNRM practices?

**Anthropologist:** No. Conflict management systems may be mutually friendly after all. Although employed by the government, councillors duly elected in the Simbu province of the highlands of Papua New Guinea intervene in ways that resemble the traditional "big man" institution; the two systems appear to have been syncretized into a single institution (Podolefsky 1990). Systems may also continue to coexist without synthesis. This can happen for all sorts of reasons. People may prefer to maintain the option of moving from one forum to another depending on the advantages and disadvantages of each and the gains to be obtained from multiple-forum actions. We must keep in mind that communities are heterosocial formations, which means that a plurality of forums may create checks and balances that a single conflict management system may not generate.

**Institute:** We know of many cases where preserving community interests will require legal action.

**Anthropologist:** Legal systems may be used to back up the rights of communities against external forces, as in the Costa Rican Cahuita National Park arrangement (Lindsay 1998; Weitzner and Fonseca, this volume). Laws may be needed to fight corruption and inequity at the local level. They may serve to promote the rights of immigrants or marginal groups (women, the landless) that are inadequately recognized by community structures and customary law, as in rural India (Chandrasekharan 1997). Let's face it, customary conflict management practices are not always committed to achieving consensus, equity, and ecological sustainability. Romantic views of non-Western societies are to be taken with a grain of salt and may do considerable harm to CBNRM research and practice.

## Return of the boomerang

**Institute:** It seems we've covered all the issues you wanted to raise. It's funny when you think of it.

**Anthropologist:** Think of what?

**Institute:** *Paradoxical* might be a better word. We asked you to develop research questions dealing with the cultural aspects of natural resource conflict management. You ended up playing two tricks on us. First, you sent the question back home, just like a boomerang. You converted what was essentially an anthropological question into a commentary on the cultural spirit of CBNRM. Second, although you addressed the cultural limitations of analytical thinking, your overall exposé was highly structured. Moreover, your answers revolved around logical contrasts pitting "our own" cultural assumptions against "theirs." Logic and categorical thinking were no less embedded in your mode of critique than they were embedded in the object of your critique.

**Anthropologist:** Interesting points. I will have to think about it. I must confess that when pitched at a conceptual level anthropology is inevitably a "residual" form of thinking. Willy-nilly, it portrays other cultures by emphasizing their otherness. Anthropology understands other milieus by showing how they differ from our own, a strategy that is bound to bring us back home. We view our "significant others" as living beyond our own surroundings — surroundings expressed in a familiar language that we can never fully escape and that will colour our explanations of otherness.

**Institute:** Can we not play with and alter our own surroundings and languages to express them, though?

**Anthropologist:** We certainly can, and this is precisely what I attempted to do with this apparently strange notion of "heteroculturalism." But there is another level of anthropological research that I have stressed throughout this conversation, namely, grounded anthropology, the kind that immerses itself in different social and cultural settings and remains open to unexpected findings. My objective was to map out the different areas where surprising results are likely be found, using as the point of departure some CBNRM assumptions: those of peace, equality, community, secularity, and rationality. I hope you found the exercise useful. Consulting the map, however, will never be a substitute for the actual journey.

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