

# Unthinking Eurocentrism: The political writing of Adam Kuper and Tim Ingold

**Justin Kenrick**

University of Edinburgh, justinkenrick@yahoo.co.uk

## Abstract

This paper examines the political grounds and consequences of Adam Kuper and Tim Ingold's writings on egalitarian indigenous peoples. It takes as its focus a simple question: how can those of us in societies defined by hierarchy understand the interaction between such hierarchical systems and those of people living in predominantly egalitarian contexts? This paper traces the historical ancestry of Kuper's argument that such peoples are mistaken to attempt to reclaim rights through asserting themselves as *indigenous peoples*, and it examines the way in which Ingold seeks to *unthink* the Eurocentric assumptions that have dismissed such peoples' perspectives as being scientifically inaccurate. The paper argues that grounding Ingold's analysis in an awareness of their political struggles can help to create political space to re-imagine political relations and scientific enquiry based on the practice of equality.

**KEYWORDS:** egalitarianism, eurocentrism, indigenous peoples, hunter-gatherers, dualism, science, resistance, myth of the noble savage, Ingold, Kuper

## Introduction

This paper examines the political grounds and consequences of Adam Kuper and Tim Ingold's writings on egalitarian indigenous peoples. It argues that their analysis lacks a grounding in the political struggles and everyday conflicts of the peoples they write about, and that foregrounding the political context and consequences of our writing clarifies rather than obscures anthropological understanding.

This paper traces the historical ancestry of Kuper's argument that such peoples' are wrong to attempt to reclaim political rights through asserting themselves as *indigenous peoples* (2003; 2005; 2006),<sup>1</sup> and it examines the Eurocentric bias underpinning his claim that this

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<sup>1</sup> Kuper's dismissal of indigenous peoples' strategies is evident, for example, when he equates the movement for indigenous peoples' rights with 'extreme right wing parties in Europe' (2005: 205), when he writes that 'the conventional lines of argument used to justify "indigenous" land claims rely on obsolete anthropological notions and on a false romantic vision' (2003: 395), and when he writes that such moves are about 'granting special privileges' (2006: 21) rather than about redressing histories of dispossession.

dismissal of indigenous peoples' rights is the consequence of his scientific rather than political perspective (2003; 400; 2006: 22). Like many before him, Kuper conjures up an idealised other in order to dash it on the rocks of supposedly empirical reality (Ellingson 2001), and so appear to prove that there are no workable alternatives to the hierarchical ordering and historical trajectory of those societies that have given rise to the social sciences.

The paper examines Ingold's attempt to *unthink* the Eurocentric assumptions that have dismissed such indigenous peoples perspectives as being scientifically inaccurate (2000; 2004). If we ground Ingold's analysis in an awareness of the political struggles within which the lifeworlds he describes are embedded, then his analysis ceases to be simply an eloquent exposition of their perspectives and a critical re-examination of our own, and instead helps to create the political space to re-imagine the possibility of political relations and scientific enquiry based on the practice of equality.

### **Kuper's eurocentrism, culture and indigenous peoples**

Kuper's writing on indigenous peoples derives, in large part, from his understanding of culture. He usefully reminds us that in current racist discourse in Europe *culture* is used as a substitute for *race*; and cultures are seen as mutually exclusive social arrangements grounded in often incompatible processes of meaning-making – a definition that creates political space for racists to argue for the exclusion of peoples deemed culturally different. However to conclude, as Kuper appears to, that we should therefore – in effect – dispense with the holistic culture concept (1999a) is to accept the racist's static and impoverished understanding of *culture*, rather than challenge it by asserting that *culture* should be properly used to refer to the dynamically processual nature of social life.

In fact, Kuper's understanding of culture is much too narrow and Eurocentric to be much use in helping us to respond to racism. What is needed is to deconstruct and challenge attempts to denigrate the *other*, whether through exclusionary notions of culture *or* through denying the legitimacy of alternative, deeply-rooted collective forms of sense-making. Both of these are an important aspect of the racist project, since peoples have often attempted to collectively construct themselves as Europeans by orientating themselves towards a common future of universal values defined as over and against those who are constructed as if still orientated towards the past. To assert the need to construct ourselves as above those who would still understand themselves in terms of culture continues this project, however unwittingly. What is needed is an analytic framework that both challenges the use of exclusionary notions of culture to denigrate or dominate others, but which does not – at the same time – deny the existence of deeply rooted contingent collective forms of sense-making, because to deny these is ultimately to assert ones own contingent cultural experience as universal and to therefore continue the racist logic in a different guise.

I have argued elsewhere (Kenrick 2006; Kenrick & Lewis 2004) that Kuper continues this denial of other's forms of sense-making when he asserts that anthropologists should stop using the term *indigenous peoples*. Kuper argues that (i) we need to abandon the notion that indigenous peoples are somehow different to other people on the planet, and that therefore (ii) we need to stop according them any rights as indigenous peoples. However, the assumptions about the universal nature of human experience underpinning this argument are

dominant cultural assumptions that do not even reflect back to us our own lived experience, let alone the experience of the *indigenous peoples* referred to (Kenrick 2009b).

The egalitarian indigenous peoples referred to in the anthropological literature<sup>2</sup> are indeed no different to those of us who have grown up in the societies that have given rise to the social sciences, not because *they* are like *us*; but because their perception of the world, their ways of relating to other persons (including non-human others) is a far better representation of *our* own experience than the dualistic and atomistic epistemology that still dominates anthropology, sociology and Wallerstein's 'other dubious disciplines' (2003).

Thus egalitarian indigenous peoples' rights to collective systems of land ownership, their right to determine their own futures, and their right to demand of the dominant society that it examine and reverse the ongoing histories of domination imposed on indigenous peoples, should be seen as part of a wider process that seeks to liberate us all from a system of property ownership and resource use, which itself creates the conditions for a completely unsustainable way of responding to planetary, social and personal problems (Kenrick 2009a). It is unsustainable not because it is driven by some innate human greed, ignorance, alienation or desire for power, but precisely because it is based on an understanding of ourselves and of social and ecological systems that is so completely at odds with the evidence presented to us by ecological systems, social systems and even – or especially – our personal experience (Milton 2002).

The paradox of indigenous peoples' rights is that although they may appear to grant special favours to groups of people claiming a distinct identity, in fact they are a means for such groups to assert their right to be treated as equal to those who dominate and marginalise them (Saugestad 2001; Kenrick 2009b). Through this, such rights can also help us to recognise the most fundamental right due to all humans: the right to resist dominating processes and to assert a sociality based on equalising processes that can enable us to defend and reclaim individual and collective agency (Graeber 2001: x–xi; Blaser 2004).

In contrast, Kuper sees indigenous peoples' rights as 'granting special privileges to a particular category of poor people' as against other 'poor and underprivileged people' who cannot make the same claim to being indigenous (2006: 21). He writes: 'One category of local people can now make legitimate claims for land, fishing and grazing rights, shares in resource companies and political representation. Others however, are excluded' (2006: 21). However, Kuper's argument that this involves an illegitimate attempt to seek privileged status based on notions of exclusive descent is – in empirical reality and political practice – entirely mistaken.<sup>3</sup> This is for two basic reasons. Firstly, asserting such rights is a first step in reclaiming local power from extractive forces,<sup>4</sup> and therefore rather

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<sup>2</sup> e.g. the Mbendjelle (Lewis 2005), the Mbuti (Turnbull 1983; Kenrick 2005), the Cree (Feit 2004; Scott 1996), the Hadza (Woodburn 1982).

<sup>3</sup> See, for example, Kenrick & Lewis 2004; Kenrick 2005.

<sup>4</sup> In terms of extraction there is also the problem of individual rights when corporations (whose resources can be enormous and whose lifespan far exceeds that of a real person) are treated as a person. In this context, individual efforts to resist corporations will only be possible on a very uneven playing field. One San in conflict with De Beers or the Government of Botswana is not an equal battle. Indigenous peoples' rights are a technique for leveling the playing field (Jerome Lewis, personal communication).

than privileging one supposedly indigenous group over against other equally marginalised non-indigenous poor people, it often involves establishing a basis for broader coalitions of collective action to reclaim local control over local resources.<sup>5</sup>

Secondly, egalitarian indigenous peoples' attempts to regain control over their subsistence and political processes resonates powerfully in the West because their claims are based not on a supposedly 'blood and soil' (Kuper 2003: 395) demand for control over resources to the exclusion of all others (poor or not), but are based on an inclusionary approach to social and ecological processes. These inclusionary approaches are well-documented in the literature and are excellently outlined by Tim Ingold (2000). However, just as Kuper's supposedly empirical statement about social categories assumes – rather than challenges – the inevitability of particular unequal power relations, so Ingold does not recognise the profound political implications of his own analysis of egalitarian hunter-gatherer understandings.

### **Ingold: Unthinking eurocentrism**

In contrast to Kuper's assertion that his argument is based on scientific 'objectivity and detachment' (2006: 22), Ingold seeks to critique and expand our understanding of the nature of this so-called *science*, and he does so through taking seriously the perspectives of those same egalitarian hunter-gatherer peoples whose claim to being indigenous Kuper dismisses.

Ingold's genius lies in his ability to open up the overarching orthodoxy running through the natural and social sciences to critical scrutiny, not through asserting a postmodernist multiplicity of truths nor through analysing its embeddedness in systems of political power, but through critiquing the notions of *objectivity*, *detachment* and *modernity* on which it is based. Instead of leaving nothing in their place, he argues for a more accurate understanding of social and ecological processes, one which takes as its starting point the perspective of egalitarian hunter-gatherer peoples. One of the key points Ingold makes (2000; 2004) is that we (natural and social scientists) are severely impeded by believing that the dualistic lens through which we are trained to perceive the world and ourselves, is an accurate way of understanding our own or any other species existence and experience. For example, in the constructivist tradition of the social sciences, we are trained to understand order and categories as something which our minds need to impose on raw experience. We learn that the sense data we receive has to be ordered by culturally learnt concepts, that the infant needs to learn higher order reasoning to be able to communicate anything other than biological needs, that such an understanding is open to humans but is closed to all (or most) other species, and that there is a fundamental divide between culture and

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<sup>5</sup> An example of such a collaboration between indigenous peoples and other equally marginalised non-indigenous poor people comes from Brazil where Tupi and Guarani indigenous peoples, Quilombolas (Afro-Brazilian maroons) and landless peasants are coordinating their campaigns to reclaim land from massive tree plantations (Marcus Colchester, pers. com). Another example of such effective alliances involve those formed against illegal logging among indigenous peoples organisations, Brazil nut gatherers and small-scale timber cutters in the Madre de Dios region of the Peruvian Amazon (Tom Griffiths, personal communication), and further examples can be drawn from the Philippines, Guatemala and many other places (Fergus MacKay, personal communication).

nature, reason and emotion, and between humans and other species (Ingold 2005: 504–5; Milton 2002; Gerhardt 2004).

Ingold points out the logical contradictions inherent in the dominant perspective: how does it understand how humans emerged from the state of nature in our evolutionary history, when did our biological programming stop determining all our behaviour, and when did history begin? He argues that, in the dominant perspective, so-called *anatomically modern humans* are understood to have evolved within biological processes, and that they are given this strange name to signify the fact that they were biologically the same as us, but were not yet part of the historical process. He argues that this is a fallacy required by our dualistic frame of reference. In *The Origin of Species* (1859) Darwin argues that all species are changing in response to their environment and so become evermore diverse and specialised, whereas in his later *The Descent of Man* (1871) he argues the opposite: that Victorian man was at the pinnacle of evolutionary progress. Instead of understanding evolution in terms of ever-increasing diversity and adaptability in relation to specific environments, Darwin's later writing implies that we need to understand evolution in terms of a kind of imperial triumph in a pre-ordained march from being dominated by instincts to being liberated by the intellect (Ingold 2004). Ironically it is those very *scientists* who argue that we are entirely determined by our *selfish genes* who most completely embody this assumption that the progress of history has enabled them to free themselves from instinct and so be able to take a perspective that is as if above and outside the biological world. Ingold argues that this dominant perspective sums up the arrogance and impoverishment of a dualistic understanding that cannot grasp that this is a worldview shaped by a particular way of relating rather than being an accurate account of the nature of reality.

Ingold argues that we need to re-examine our ways of understanding the world from the perspective of engagement, and that this means that we need to stop trying to understand ourselves as divided beings: mind and body, thought and instinct, rationality and emotion, humans and environment, moderns and pre-moderns. Instead, he argues, we would do better to take our cue from the understandings that have authority in egalitarian hunter-gatherer societies and recognise ourselves as immersed from the start in a network of reciprocating persons, as able to initiate and respond to the communication of human and non-human others. He argues that we are 'already situated in an environment of human and nonhuman others, and committed to the relationships thus entailed. In my own work, I have referred to this view as the "dwelling perspective"' (Ingold 2005: 503).

### **Kuper and Ingold: Apartheid, Kgalagari and the Sami?**

These broad brushstrokes seek to convey Kuper's critique of the indigenous peoples' movement and Ingold's critique of dualistic science, but the reader may already be feeling uncomfortable. Reading this account of Ingold's analysis, it may appear as if the spectre of the *Noble Savage* – at one with nature, not dividing the world into dualistic superior and inferior realms – is on the loose in this paper, is out stalking the land. Kuper's critique – his argument that the term *indigenous people* is just a politically correct euphemism for the old discredited categories of the *primitive* or *native* (2005: 204) – may begin to feel like

an attractive argument. In the light of Ingold's analysis, and despite his apolitical stance, Kuper may seem right to argue that 'primitive society has become a political ideal, at least for many Greens and anti-globalisation activists. For the indigenous peoples' movement, the world of hunter-gatherers is a lost Eden' (2005: xii).

Kuper does not examine the way in which political arrangements in liberal democracies are intertwined with a capitalist economic system that not only denies the possibility for equal dialogue with indigenous peoples but also systematically destroys the social and ecological systems on which it depends.<sup>6</sup> Perhaps Kuper's inability to recognise the way in which liberal democracies can work with corporations to deny indigenous peoples' rights is partly the consequence of his experience under apartheid in South Africa, where the notion of radically different *cultures* proved an acceptable apology for apartheid<sup>7</sup> and where liberal democratic arrangements for universal suffrage would have appeared to be very much part of the solution not part of the problem. However, it is also perhaps results from anthropologists' tendency to perceive the world from the point of view of those they conduct fieldwork with. Kuper's fieldwork in southern Africa was with the Kgalagari 'pastoralists, horticulturists and migrant labourers, living in compact village communities' (1999b: 24) whose notions of inclusive democratic processes bracketed out both women and hunter-gatherers. Kuper writes that the 'Kgalagari had democratic political institutions (up to a point, excluding women and Bushmen), and they were active in a sophisticated manner in district and national politics' (1999b: 25).

In considering the political implications of the position of anthropology and anthropologists, it is worth considering why Van Gennep's well-known prediction has not materialised. Van Gennep writes: 'I would say that ethnography in the twentieth century will provide the foundation upon which a new philosophical conception of mankind will be based' (in Belmont 1979: 115). In his critique of the *Myth of the Noble Savage* (2001), Ter Ellingson gives one possible answer to the question of why this has not taken place. He suggests that there is almost a failsafe mechanism in the discipline to ensure that it does not get out of hand and actually challenge the fundamental assumption in our society that

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<sup>6</sup> Instead he appears to argue that such political arrangements benefit indigenous peoples over and against more dominant political groups. For example, he writes that the Innu of Labrador 'demand the restoration of ancestral lands' (2003: 392). Samson who has conducted extensive fieldwork with the Innu (2003) points out (Ash & Samson 2004: 261) that in saying this he is completely ignoring the way in which 'under the weight of crippling conditions in the Labrador Innu villages ... [and] the continued appropriation of lands... the Innu Nation has continually *reduced* the area included in its so-called demands'. Ash and Samson point out that Kuper is also wrong to say that 'the government excludes Settlers from collective land claims and treats them as squatters' (2003: 392), since the government continually works with Settlers and business people – authorising a \$55 million mine and 'the second-largest dam in the world ... in the heart of Innu territories'. They add that 'Settlers and business people who have acquired land in a land-claim area are considered to have equal rights to it, no matter how they came by it' (2004: 261).

<sup>7</sup> In 'Shifting Paradigms in the new South Africa' C.S. Van Der Waal and Vivienne Ward state that in the post-Apartheid South Africa, anthropologists are moving on from such polarised positions in relation to *culture*: 'Expose analyses of colonial and apartheid notions of "cultures" and "ethnic groups" do not address the justifiable political claims by "first peoples", "tribes" of "communities" to land and other resources in the new South Africa' (2006: 17).

there is no positive alternative to hierarchical social organisations and no alternative to the myth of inevitable progress in the direction European societies have taken.

Ingold manages to elude this failsafe mechanism, partly by being resolutely apolitical. He doesn't examine the political consequences of the dominant perspective: the way in which this dualistic ideology has fitted perfectly with the genocide and exploitation of supposedly *lesser* peoples and other species that has been central to earlier and contemporary colonial processes. He manages this even though he draws on the writings of anthropologists who are themselves intensely involved in the struggles of egalitarian societies to retain some political and social space to decide their own futures. It would be ironic if part of the reason for his managing to maintain this apolitical stance is because the peoples he worked with – the European Sami – have long since achieved some measure of political autonomy. However, his analysis has as powerful, if diametrically opposite, political implications to the supposedly apolitical stance of Adam Kuper.

### **Mythtaking the Noble Savage**

If Ingold's analysis inadvertently conjures up the spectre of the *Noble Savage* haunting the discipline, Ellingson points out that this image paradoxically functions to assert that there is no alternative to the myth of inevitable progress. As Patrick Bratlinger points out, the myth of progress can only be maintained by reference to a category of those who are *backward*, and by denying the savage way in which those deemed backwards are treated in the ongoing colonial project (2003). Margaret Thatcher in her 1998 Bruge speech is quoted as saying that: 'the story of how Europeans explored and colonised and – yes, without apology – civilised much of the world is an extraordinary tale of talent, skill and courage' (in Solomos & Black 1994: 154).

Bratlinger's grim exploration of Victorian and post-Victorian discourse on the *superiority* and inevitability of European *civilisation*, demonstrates this *civilisation's* dependence on the *inferiority* and inevitable extinction of the *primitive races* of the world. In *Dark Vanishings* (2003), Bratlinger demonstrates the way in which this extinction was seen as an inevitable result of the self-extminating savagery of such *primitives*, and as a process which European expansion and success simply accelerated. In terms of the Darwin of 1871, this was seen as an outcome of the laws of 'the survival of the fittest'. Bratlinger's examination of the way this discourse was used to justify inadequate action by the British government in the face of the Irish potato famine highlights the broader structural dualism of this hierarchical social ordering underpinned by a dualistic belief system. This dualism assumes the inevitability of progress for those following the iron laws of liberal political economy and the inevitable demise of the inferior backward other (Latour 1993: 39). The supposedly *inevitable* triumph of colonisation and progress only makes sense in contrast to this *inevitable* vanishing of *primitive* peoples. Yet Bratlinger also highlights the growing fear over this period that the very superiority and success of European civilisation might be leading to a *softness* and decadence that might bring on the extinction of Europeans themselves, especially since those *primitives* were showing no sign of dying out of their own accord after all.

Kuper's argument that we need to simply incorporate indigenous peoples into liberal democratic state systems, and Ingold's that we need to learn from such peoples' ways of relating to the environment and each other, might best be considered in the light of two larger encompassing frameworks: as evident today as they were in Bratlinger's account of 19<sup>th</sup> century European triumph. One concerns humanity's relationship with the natural world, and the other concerns the ongoing *triumph* of neo-liberalism (albeit a triumph that may be running our ecology and societies into the ground). In relation to the former: on the one hand, we experience a daily barrage of scientific facts concerning climate chaos and possible human extinction; on the other hand alongside this, there is a powerful faith in technology's ability to solve whatever problems the scientific-industrial complex creates and a fear that we might go soft and not recognise that our well-being depends on such technological exploitation. Keith Thomas suggests that the early modern period had generated feelings that the very civilising process that had enabled us to conquer the natural world might also be making us too comfortable and too soft to recognise that our well-being depends on the dominance (rather than appreciation) of nature (1983: 302).

This ties into the second larger framework, in which the *triumph* of the neo-liberal West is seen as an inevitable consequence of our superior rationality and technology. For example, a belief in the West's *inevitable triumph* in the *War on Terror*, contrasts with a sense of extreme vulnerability to being overwhelmed by the *other*, the latter sentiment being used as a means to galvanise people out of their presumed lethargy and into a proper appreciation of how supposedly vulnerable the West's *open society* is to the supposedly mindless destructiveness of the *terrorists*. The contrast between a Senior Associate Dean of *Harvard Business School*, who sees tolerance in this context as a weakness (Quelch 2005), and the writing of the President of the *Association of Social Anthropologists*, who sees intolerance as a greater danger (Gledhill 2005), is instructive. Quelch focuses on the need for universities to keep an eye on the enemy within and control debate since a 'relaxed tolerance of diversity of opinion, even extremist rhetoric, provides an excellent arena for those seeking to quietly turn impressionable young minds in classrooms'. In contrast Gledhill stresses that 'more open debates tend to expose to greater critical scrutiny the possible premises of national states' global strategies and the role of different political, commercial and military backstage interests in shaping the behaviour of democratic governments'. In an uncannily similar contrast, where Kuper would appear to see indigenous peoples' rights as a means for some groups to take advantage of the West's *open society*,<sup>8</sup> Ingold's writing stresses the need to open our debates to their perspectives in order to better understand how we know the world and how we are impeded from knowing the world. However, we also need to recognise how these indigenous peoples' knowledge systems and ways of relating interact with dominating power, and in the process evaluate the political implications of both Kuper's and Ingold's analyses.

The processes of annihilation bound up with the *inevitable vanishing* premise that underpinned the British and many other European empires attitudes elsewhere in the world, was perhaps most powerfully challenged by the German State engaging on European soil in

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<sup>8</sup> For example, as noted above, Kuper argues that recognising indigenous peoples' rights in Labrador has led to the exclusion of 'Settlers from collective land claims' and to their being treated as squatters (2003: 392). He continues his account of what he appears to see as this abuse of liberal democratic judicial systems by describing how 'Courts in Australia, New Zealand, and the U.S.A. have also been persuaded to grant land rights to indigenous peoples'.



similar processes of annihilation during World War Two. This marked a shift from the dominance of the *inevitable* annihilation strategy to the dominance of the *inevitable* assimilation strategy. Attempts at annihilation had, of course, always accompanied attempts at assimilation. Bratlinger writes of Robinson's 1830's attempts to make the 'indolent' Tasmanian 'blackfellow' work (2003: 125) in 'his apparently humane, Christian concentration camp' (2003: 126), and how these attempts to 'civilise' were believed to have killed the final Tasmanians (2003: 127). After World War Two, decolonising peoples in Africa and elsewhere became as assimilated into the nation-state model as the white settler societies already were. Especially in the latter, marginalised indigenous peoples within these countries have increasingly resisted this process of assimilation into nation-state systems in which a language of universal equality is used to justify a systematic reproduction of inequality. It could be argued that in this political context anthropology surely has to relinquish its romantic attachments to being 'a science of mourning' (Bratlinger 2003: 138) for peoples who are supposedly 'inevitably vanishing', and also to being a 'science in denial' of its political context. Instead, anthropology needs to work to establish the empirical ground on which this systematic reproduction of inequality can be challenged.

One of the central ways in which van Gennepe's hope has been rebuffed, and one of the central ways in which anthropology has been tamed, has been through the operation of the myth of the *Noble Savage*. Ellingson highlights that whilst the myth of the 'backward savage' has provided a justification for the colonial project, there is what he calls 'a less obvious and more insidious' aspect to the 'Noble Savage Myth' (2001: xiii). Ellingson points out that the [mistaken] notion that Rousseau was advocating the nobility of *savages* has been invoked ever since to criticise any who would suggest that there are other, egalitarian, possibilities open to human society. From Henry Maine (1861) onwards, anthropologists became obsessed with debunking the *nobility* of a *savage* no one had ever believed was noble. Ellingson draws our attention to the double sleight of hand here: debunking the supposed *nobility* of the so-called *savage* actually reinforces an implicit belief in the *savagery* of the other, a belief that is with us as powerfully today as it has ever been.

The process at work here is perhaps more insidious than Ellingson suggests. Aleiss is not unusual in his claim that 'the noble savage, according to 18<sup>th</sup> century French philosopher Jean-Jacques Rousseau, is an individual living in a "pure state of nature" – gentle, wise, uncorrupted by the vices of civilization' (1991: 91). Fuyuki Kurasawa (2004: 41) argues that Rousseau used an imaginary state of nature as a way of critiquing – and highlighting as historically and culturally specific – what he saw as the devastatingly unequal relations imposed by private property. As many have pointed out (e.g. Barnard 2000), Rousseau should therefore be understood as one of the forerunners of anthropology, and as Marcus and Fischer have pointed out, this attempt to critique the West from the vantage point of an idealised other has long since been discredited. Marcus and Fischer argue that this is because:

to invoke another culture now is to locate it in a time and space contemporaneous with our own, and thus to see it as part of our world, rather than as a mirror or alternative to ourselves, arising from a totally alien origin (1986: 116).

However, Marcus and Fischer's critique (like that of Kuper's) assumes that an opposition between *them* and *us* has been played out in a way which has led to *us* absorbing *them*, whereas in fact the supposedly *radical other* may not only now be enmeshed in the same systems of inequality as ourselves, but we may now be recognising that relational accounts of their experience may be more accurate ways of analysing our own experience than the dualistic accounts we are accustomed to.<sup>9</sup> In contrast to this emerging recognition of a global world in which processes both of domination and relationality are playing themselves out, Rousseau's critique rested on opposing a concept of man in the state of nature as self-reliant, independent and isolated, with a concept of the mutual reliance and dependence brought about by the division of labour. In a sense, the impossibility of the former, while providing him with a vantage point to critique the latter, actually strengthens the sense of the inevitability of the latter.

Thus in the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century, Henry Maine could attack Rousseau for suggesting that 'a perfect social order could be evolved from the unassisted consideration of the state of nature' (Kuper 2005: 42), and in doing so Maine was criticising the first French revolution since Maine fundamentally 'championed aristocratic forms of government and opposed the extension of the suffrage' (Kuper 2005: 39). In the same period (in 1859), John Crawford used an attack on the notion of the *Noble Savage* to become president of the *Ethnological Society of London* as part of a racist coup within the society attacking anthropological advocacy of the human rights of conquered peoples (Ellingson 2001). For Crawford, attacking the Noble Savage myth became a way of justifying the advance of 'civilisation' and a way of naturalising 'a genocidal stance towards the "inferior" races' (Ellingson 2001: 298) based on 'asserting scientific validity for the stereotypical racist hierarchies that inevitably placed whites at the top and darker races in subordinate positions on the scale of nature' (Ellingson 2001: 305).

Ellingson concludes that: 'the Noble savage myth becomes ... a kind of meta-spook lurking in the background to haunt anthropological mindspace, ready to be ritually invoked to terrorise those who slip into the heresy of egalitarian "philanthropy" and defence of human rights' (2001: 388). Adam Kuper's writing on *The Return of the Native* (2003; 2005; 2006) is a powerful continuation of this meta-spooking – this conjuring up of an idealised other, in order to apparently dash it on the rocks of reality and so prove that alternatives to our own hierarchical social order are non-existent or unworkable.<sup>10</sup> Kuper's version of this meta-spooking has very real consequences not only for anthropological understanding itself, but for the people we work with.

Perhaps I am being unfair to Kuper when I say that the political consequences of his critique – unlike that of the avowedly racist Crawford – are unintentional. I would

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<sup>9</sup> I have no space to explore this here, but see Ingold 2000: 40–61, Milton 2002 40–54, and Kenrick 2009b; 2010.

<sup>10</sup> Debbie Rose examines the way in which dualism creates an either/or double bind in which the only alternatives are that 'they' are either the 'Noble (indigenous) Ecologist ... [who] lives in perfect harmony' or the 'Dismal (indigenous) Ecologist ... [who is] pragmatic, ruthless and destructive' (2003: 56). By demonstrating the impossibility of the former, the latter is left as the default position, something which can simply be assumed and asserted, in no need of proof.

like to believe that it is political naivety rather than sophistry that leads Kuper to claim (2003: 400; 2006: 22) that it is his opponents whose analysis is guided by their politics, whereas he is simply guided by the wish to be scientifically accurate. Patrick Wolfe points out that – intentional or not – ‘True to the style of conservative politics, Kuper claims (e.g. 1993: 68) that his approach is animated by factual rather than political concerns’ (Wolfe 2006: 27). Wolfe points out that this division between political expediency and scientific accuracy ‘makes it very easy for conservative anthropologists to cite scholarly rigour as an excuse for the political outcomes of their practice’ (2006: 26) and adds that ‘No doubt the Botswana government was gratified to have its claim that there is nothing special about the Bushmen so authoritatively endorsed. Surprisingly, the Australian government does not seem to have heard Kuper’s message as yet’ (2006: 27; see also the use of Kuper’s argument in the Republic of Botswana’s Circular of the Office of the President 2006).

Kuper is the latest in a long line of those who would seek to deny the legitimacy of indigenous peoples, a line that Ellingson traces right the way back through the history of the European conquest and dispossession of other peoples. In a powerful echo of the sleight of hand Ellingson identifies as being central to the simultaneous construction and demolition of the *Noble Savage* – Kuper says that their ‘land claims rely on obsolete anthropological notions and on a false romantic vision’ (Kuper 2003: 395). By contrast, Werner Zips highlights the fact that the indigenous peoples’ movement brings together an array of ‘groups, societies and nations deprived of their right of self-determination by more powerful usurpers to concentrate their energies on the age-long struggle for human rights’ (2006: 27). Zips writes that, although we would do well to question the term *indigenous*, we need to understand it in its historical context. It emerged in the law of conquering nations to deny those so-labelled any right to govern themselves, and deny them rights to their own labour and lands. Although such peoples have been historically defined as indigenous by exploitative and/or paternalistic state powers in order to control them, the term has been reclaimed through the intense work of indigenous peoples in international fora since the 1960s. Here *indigenoussness* has not propounded a discourse ‘about primitiveness, cultural purity or exclusive ancestral roots, but about unfolding *in practice* such notions as equality, procedural justice and a universal right of self-determination’ (2006: 28). Such rights are powerfully resisted by nation-states, and by international corporations and international financial institutions that would prefer such nation-states to facilitate rather than impede their access to indigenous peoples’ resources and labour. This is the historical and political context out of which and within which Kuper’s supposedly apolitical argument is made.

## **The political writings of Tim Ingold**

Having examined one extremely lucid strand in Adam Kuper’s writing to demonstrate the way in which anthropologists can reproduce Eurocentric assumptions, I would like to examine the way – in his equally lucid way – Ingold seeks to *unthink* these same Eurocentric assumptions. I will also seek to identify what is missing in Ingold’s analysis, in order to map a clearer path towards understanding the beliefs and practices that enable relational egalitarianism.

Where Sidsel Saugestad defines indigenous peoples relationally, in terms of their relationship of subordination to a nation-state majority (Saugestad 2001; 2004), Ingold highlights their relational way of knowing the world. Where Saugestad's relational understanding of indigenous peoples' experience places the emphasis on their relationship with dominant groups, and therefore on their particular experience of *powerlessness*, Ingold's relational understanding highlights the way egalitarian beliefs and practices create the social context for an experience of enabling power: of equality and autonomy.

Ingold further argues that such peoples reflect back to us not some primordial vision, but the reality that our belief in dualism deludes us into thinking of ourselves as powerless when in fact it is in the nature of embodied beings to be able to apprehend the world directly through embodied engagement as whole beings rather than through relying on imposed concepts (2000). Ingold writes about this eloquently in terms of hunter-gatherer and also mainstream Western experience, but although he explores the nature of this embodied experience, he does not balance his positive relational understanding with an analysis of the process of disempowerment that these same egalitarian indigenous peoples have to contend with.

Interestingly, however, his analysis does highlight the ways in which people within mainstream capitalism experience in their bodies the reality of dualism and atomism and the way in which such a system seeks (and inevitably fails) to persuade us that this *is* the nature of reality.

He does this, for example, in relation to our experience of time and the workplace, where he writes that the temporal logic of capitalism requires the establishment of an absolute division between work and social life, enforced against the resistance of people's mutual involvement in the real-life settings of practical activity. Interestingly, he does not see this as simply a one-way process, since people re-appropriate the machines and clocks to become aspects of their personal identity. Ingold quotes Marx (1844) as saying that the worker is only 'at home when he is not working, and when he is working he is not at home' (in Ingold 2000: 331). From Marx's perspective: leaving for work, the worker not only leaves his dwelling, he ceases to dwell, he is not himself, his activity no longer belongs to himself. In contrast to this, Ingold stresses that, although from the perspective of the factory owner the worker may be no more than an extension of the machine, the experience of the worker is different. Rather than simply operating a technology, they are *coping with* machines, which require a good measure of skill built up through experience. The worker does *not* cease to dwell in the workplace, he is at *home* there, but it may be a profoundly uncomfortable place to be. It is as persons that they engage with these machines: for just as machines have been created to do what skilled hands did before, different skills have been developed to handle the machines themselves. From the factory owner's point of view, operating technology produces commodities and the factory runs by clock time; but from the workers point of view, coping with machines is part of the process that produces the worker as a skilled social agent, and this involves the task-oriented skill that enables us to cope with clocks. 'The time intrinsic to the experience of coping with clocks is not itself clock time' (Ingold 2000: 333). Thus Ingold argues that task-orientation flourishes at the core of industrial production in workers' activities of coping with machines. A point which

echoes Carrier when he writes that ‘mutual assistance or co-operation in the workplace occurs between persons, they are morally obligated to do so and are transacting as part of a social web that identifies them and their relationships and obligations to one another’ (Carrier 1992: 202–3). In this way, Ingold connects his analysis of the egalitarian hunter-gatherer experience of the environment with our everyday experience in a way which highlights the contrast between imposed dualisms and resistant relationality. This – I would argue – is the fundamental political import of his work that is never explicitly connected to the political struggles of the indigenous peoples whose lives he is referring to.

Ingold writes: ‘The criticism that the political is conspicuous by its absence from my own attempts to formulate a dwelling perspective is entirely just, and troubling. Something needs to be added if we are to understand the dynamics of power in human environmental relationships, but what should that be?’ (2005: 503). His answer is a fascinating analysis of how conservation embodies a dualistic perspective that destroys the possibility of dwelling and the continuation of place. He does not, however, examine the struggles of those peoples whose understandings and experience he has drawn on to fundamentally challenge this dualistic perspective.

Ingold does not explicitly examine the connection between the experiences of dualism and the broader political processes with which egalitarian hunter-gatherers and Westerners contend. When he does examine the term *indigenous* directly, and concludes that it is used in international documents to define them as those who were ‘there first’ and so situates them ‘within a narrative of colonial conquest and state formation’ (2000: 151), he is quite explicitly not seeking to analyse the political ‘relations between indigenous minorities and nation states’ (2000: 133), but to examine the dualistic mind frame that is unable to grasp ‘that indigenous peoples draw their being from their relationship with the land’ (2000: 150) rather than from any dualistic and atomistic principle of descent.

Although Ingold offers us an extremely creative thought experiment, it is one that needs to be tested by being grounded in the actual political struggles and lifeworlds of those he describes. These involve struggles to resist state definitions, while engaging with these definitions in order to assert ‘*in practice* such notions as equality, procedural justice and a universal right of self-determination’ (Zips 2006: 28). In focusing on three of the peoples’ whose perception of the environment he discusses in depth – the James Bay Cree, Australian Aboriginal peoples, and the Mbuti of the Ituri – I will seek to analyse the way in which their perception of personhood and power (the focus of Ingold’s studies) is grounded in their political struggles and lifeworlds. In doing so, I hope to articulate an egalitarian indigenous peoples’ perspective which understands *indigenous* not as an exclusive category designed to privilege some people over others, nor even primarily as a strategy to recover political ground for marginal groups vis-à-vis a dominant society. Rather this perspective asserts an understanding of *indigenous* as defined by inclusive processes that are aimed at ensuring the establishment and maintenance of relations of equality with all human and non-human persons.

## **Critiques of Ingold's *political vanishing***

The technique Ingold uses throughout *The Perception of the Environment* is to identify the way in which a dualistic perspective leads to a fundamental contradiction at the heart of our understanding. He then highlights the perspective of an egalitarian hunter-gatherer society on the same subject and argues that our dualistic misunderstanding results from our conditioning rather than from the underlying nature of human experience or the world. Yasushi Uchiyamada describes this as a 'three-step method' (2004: 723), writing that 'we are repeatedly told what is wrong with the Cartesian dichotomy, then we are shown an alternative phenomenological model, which is followed by an imperative to revert' (2004: 724). Uchiyamada's criticism is that Ingold asks us to revert from a dwelling perspective 'without spelling out how this takes place' (2004: 724). The implication being that Ingold does not present a political analysis of the forces that construct and maintain this Cartesian misinterpretation of lived experience, nor does he spell out the political implications of his argument. Just as Uchiyamada forcefully writes about 'the disappearance of the political' in Ingold's writing (2004: 723), Neil Thin criticises Ingold for his lack of political perspective. Thin writes that Ingold 'offers no suggestions as to how scholarship of his kind can or should interact with the world outside academia' (Thin 2002: 121).

Thin also questions whether Ingold's writing actually poses real intellectual challenges, and gives as an example Ingold's claim that 'human life is a process that involves the passage of time' and that 'this life-process is also the process of the formation of the landscapes in which people have lived' (Ingold 2000: 189, cited in Thin 2002: 121). However, the view that these statements are hardly contentious carries weight only because Thin does not juxtapose them with the perspective Ingold is contending with, namely the naturalist view of the landscape as a neutral backdrop and the culturalist view of the landscape as clothed in meaning. Ingold argues that these apparently contrasting views actually both serve to maintain the dominant perspective that humans are fundamentally separate from and superior to the environment with which they interact. Although Ingold may not spell out the political implications of his argument, the argument is contentious precisely because the political implications are profound.

## **Ingold and the Cree**

The political implications of Ingold's writing become apparent when one reads Peter Munz's critique of Ingold's perspective on people like the Ojibwa. Munz argues that Ojibwa believing they can hear the stones speak does not demonstrate that they are 'more sensitive to the environment than ... science-minded Westerners'; instead they 'guard their belief that stones speak very jealously to remain different from everybody else' (2002: 440).

In Munz's view peoples such as the Ojibwa or Cree cling to irrational beliefs for the rational reason of wanting to remain distinct from others, but the scientific mind is:

... actually more deeply embedded in [the environment] than the Ojibwa mind's poetics of dwelling ... If the Ojibwa believe that stones speak, they are much less sensitive; and their belief ... must be seen to be a cultural invention that they need to be a closed society (2002: 441).

Munz concludes that:

... it is science that is sensitive and the Cree who are insensitive... Their inability to distinguish nature from culture, far from being in tune with the environment, is, on the contrary, an important aspect of their culture, and precisely an aspect that allows them to isolate themselves from all non-Cree people (2002: 442).

Munz argument that (Western) *science* is correct in drawing a sharp distinction between nature and culture, and that the Cree simply maintain a belief in the personhood of non-human others in order to draw a distinction between themselves and human others, clearly restates the dominant Eurocentric perspective. However, it is profoundly challenged by those ethnographers cited by Ingold, and in particular by Colin Scott's writing on Cree science and Harvey Feit's writing on Cree political struggles and their relationship with non-Cree others.

Colin Scott (1996) argues that both Western science and Cree science rely on drawing deductive inferences from first premises and that both verify these inferences deliberately and systematically in relation to experience. He argues that it has been an effect of Western ethnocentrism to construe non-Western knowledge systems as less rational than its own. He further argues that what distinguishes Western science from Cree science is the root metaphor employed to organise their data. In Eurocentric science, the root metaphor is one of an all-pervasive culture/ nature split; in Cree science, the root metaphor is of trans-species personhood. Thus (*contra* Munz) rather than this being a reflection of their scientific 'insensitivity', it is the basis of their science. If there is not some external *objectivist* position from which to ascertain the competing truth claims of these two forms of science, perhaps the only basis for a comparative evaluation is in terms of their consequences on the ground. Where Eurocentric science demonstrates the truth of its claims (or root metaphor) by demonstrating its ability to alter and manipulate environments and to dominate those with competing metaphors, Cree science could be understood as seeking to demonstrate its truth claims through its daily interactions with human and non-human others, including non-Cree human others.

Harvey Feit writes about the difficult political relationships the Cree have to negotiate with more powerful non-Cree others. He writes about the way in which the Cree metaphor of trans-species personhood translates into a political injunction to remain open to dialogue with the land and with non-Cree human others. This stands in direct contrast to Munz's claim that their culture is based on being able to 'isolate themselves from all non-Cree people' (2002: 442). When Munz writes of Ojibwa and Cree 'ethnic failures to distinguish between animate and inanimate, between culture and nature' (2002: 433) and writes that they 'cling to their idiosyncratic practices' (2002: 440), his writing echoes that of the 'inevitable vanishing' thesis, the notion that such people are mistaken, backward, and will inevitably perish or be assimilated by the dominant West. Feit quotes an applied anthropologist, Paul Bertrand, who was called to testify by the Quebec development corporations in support of their push to build the James Bay hydro-electric project on Cree territory. Feit quotes from Bertrand's court testimony in which he argued that the Cree need

the shock the huge dams would create in order to force them into seeking development; meaning development along the lines deemed progressive from a Eurocentric perspective. Bertrand is quoted as saying:

In my opinion Cree culture is heading towards a blockage ... the impacts they have received to date have not produced what a bigger impact would have produced. That is, a sort of collective renewal, a sensation of becoming, a wish to do something to improve, but an active wish, something felt (Bertrand, cited in Feit 2004: 114).

Feit writes that in the court case the argument was that ‘the Cree hunting way of life was dead or dying, and that Cree Indians were in fact already all but assimilated’ (2004: 112) and – in a powerful echo of Kuper’s argument – that they were using their ‘indigenous peoples’ status simply to gain privileges and money. He cites the president of Hydro-Quebec as saying ‘When they say that it is not a question of material compensation, I do not believe them’ (cited in Feit 2004: 117).

However, where the dominant perspective saw the Cree as having no choice but to become assimilated and organised within Western hierarchical structures, what happened was the opposite. The James Bay Cree organised within their own particular frame of political action *against* such structures, and sought to build international alliances with those who sought to do likewise.<sup>11</sup> However, their frame of political action is one grounded in the need for dialogue with human and non-human others, which means attempting to persuade those developers who would destroy their land to instead come and experience the land for themselves so that they can hear the experience of non-human others. Feit writes about Cree attempts to curtail developers unsustainable logging methods – methods which the Cree saw as destroying the ability of beavers, moose and others non-humans to remain on the land – and he writes that Cree are ‘profoundly aware that in many respects and places the land is being transformed and destroyed, and that it will never be the same again, and this creates an extraordinary sadness, resolve and incomprehension’ (2000: 142).

Where Munz argues that the Cree seek to maintain an ‘inability to distinguish nature from culture’ in order to retain a closed society, Feit argues that even as:

Cree hunters seek to resist domination, they also seek not to cut themselves off so completely from the social potential of the other that they fail to remain open to future opportunities for dialogue and respectful relationships. This repeatedly recreates efforts to initiate change by recognizing the other [animal or human] as potential partner (2000: 141).

In response to the suggestion by Feit and other Cree leaders that the Cree should break off negotiation with logging companies whose word cannot be trusted, an elder berates them saying: “Don’t they” – those Cree leaders and myself – “know that we

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<sup>11</sup> For example, in their successful international campaign against the Great Whale dam project, Deputy Grand Chief Romeo Saganash stated ‘The white man believes that he can come and destroy our lands and our way of life to make a profit. We do not accept this’ (Jenson & Papillon 2000: 254).



cannot protect the land if we go around only blaming and accusing them?” He claimed it was necessary to continue to seek relationships, even when they are not working, because only with such relationships can the animals and the land be effectively cared for and respected. To cut off relationships on an enduring basis in frustration would affect not only what can be in the future; it would affect the expression of relationships now. Cutting off communication denies the relationships one already has, and expresses a thoughtlessness and disrespect’ (2004: 106).<sup>12</sup>

## Ingold and Australian Aboriginal politics

Ingold’s challenge to the Eurocentric bias in even very sensitive interpretations of Australian Aboriginal peoples’ experience of the environment strongly echoes his writing on the Cree. However, the parallel with the Cree material also extends to Ingold’s failure to connect this with Aboriginal peoples’ political context and strategies.

Ingold’s account of Aboriginal perspectives stands in stark contrast to many anthropologists’ understanding of Aboriginal relationship with the environment expressed through the ‘Dreaming’. Where many interpret this in terms of Aborigines having ‘truly *culturalised space* and made out of *impersonal geography* a home’ (Myers 1986: 54, emphasis added), Ingold argues that here people are not mapping social life *onto* a landscape. They are moving *within* the landscape, the land and the people shaping each other. His eloquent understanding of their relationship with what is experienced as a living environment lacks, however, an awareness of the political context in which such understandings and ways of relating seek to persist. It lacks a mapping of the political intersection of dualisms of domination with such indigenous peoples’ processes of inclusion.

The Cree attempt to survive abuse by the more powerful other without closing off communication with that other, is a recurring motif in indigenous peoples’ attempts to establish relationships of equality with politically and technologically powerful Western interests (see, for example, Merlan 2005 on Aboriginal struggles). The Yarralin people in northeast Australia whom Debbie Rose worked with describe these powerful interests as acting according to *Captain Cook’s law*. This has involved Europeans stealing land, killing people, capturing them to work for Europeans, and then denying that this process is taking place. A Yarralin man, Hobbles, described how Aboriginal land and labour was used to make Europeans strong, while Europeans at the same time denied that stolen land and labour were the basis of their strength (Rose 1992: 190). Rose points out that this:

[C]onquest is based on desire, and on the illusion of winners and losers. One wins by disabling not only the opposition but the very life systems in which the opposition is embedded. This is a fatal error for there are no other life systems... a failure of intersubjectivity which damages life-sustaining relationships and which must, therefore, eventually rebound (Rose 1992: 191).

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<sup>12</sup> Sharon Venne notes, however, that historically Cree have made a distinction between democratically accountable Chiefs (the *Chief proper*) who seeks dialogue, and the War Chief who may be required in times of extreme danger to assume complete authority for a period (2002: 180–3).

Europeans say that the conquest is finished, that it was the product of many and inescapable causes, and that Aborigines have to stop living in the past and adapt to the new order. Hobbles replies that Europeans are living in the past, following a law with no future: that Captain Cooks' successors continue to destroy the interconnected life system that supports them. 'From a Yarralin perspective, it is so obvious that this cannot continue indefinitely' (Rose 1992: 198).

## Central African hunter-gatherers and being indigenous

In contrast to Kuper's emphasis on indigenous peoples as being an *exclusive category* designed to privilege some people over others, and in contrast to Ingold's emphasis on their modes of perception to the exclusion of their modes of political engagement, Cree and Aboriginal ways of relating to human and non-human others highlights the way in which the *indigenous* experience of egalitarian practices needs to be understood as involving *inclusive processes* that are aimed at ensuring the establishment and maintenance of relations of equality with all human and non-human persons.

An analysis of central social processes amongst egalitarian hunter-gatherers in Central Africa highlights the importance of shifting our focus to the interaction between penetratingly exclusive categories and subversively inclusive processes that are at work both in our analyses and in the empirical realities we are seeking to understand (Kenrick 2009b).

I have argued that Ingold's analysis of these *inclusive processes* amongst indigenous peoples is highly illuminating, both in relation to the rich ethnographies he examines and in relation to his profound reflections on Western thinking and experience. However his analysis would need to change profoundly to accommodate the political realities of *penetratingly exclusive categories* that work their way down into these contexts through the wider hierarchical social relations with which these peoples have to contend.

Ingold takes as one of his major starting points the writing of Colin Turnbull on the Mbuti Pygmies (the Forest People) of the Ituri Forest in north-eastern Congo (1965; 1983; 1993). Turnbull's writing has tended to be accepted unquestioningly or dismissed completely, and this is in part because of the profound challenge it poses to our cultural assumptions, and in part because it is presented as if happening in an isolated world, whereas Mbuti experience in Turnbull's day as now is profoundly shaped by interaction with broader political and historical forces, most recently through devastating years of war.

Ingold draws on Turnbull's opposing categories of the Mbuti hunter-gatherers (who experience their forest as a loving parent), and the Bila village farmers (who see the environment as an ancestor who they fear) (e.g. Ingold 2000: 43, 48). Ingold points out that when the Mbuti hunter-gatherers address the forest as mother or father they are not projecting human qualities onto the environment. For them, there is not a fundamental divide between the human and non-human realms. He further argues that this is not a quaint belief of an exotic other about to be absorbed into 'disenchanted modernity', nor should we understand this by saying that they perceive the world one way and we perceive it another. Ingold argues that they do not see themselves as standing outside the world imposing categories and beliefs *on* experience, rather they are taking up a view *in* the world, a world where the other is perceived as already being in relation to oneself and as being one's equal.

Now, from my research with Mbuti hunter-gatherers and Bila fisher-farmers in the same area of the Ituri, I would not differ greatly with either Ingold's or Turnbull's picture of Mbuti relations with their forest environment, nor with their picture of a people who are fiercely egalitarian and who have powerful and highly individualistic processes of ridicule, ritual and rhetoric with which to undermine those seeking to dominate, process which are used to return such people to an embeddedness in the dynamic nature of equal social relations (Kenrick 1999; 2002; 2005). However, my difficulty with Turnbull's analysis and therefore with the idealised and apolitical nature of Ingold's framework, comes into play when we look at the relationship between the Mbuti hunter-gatherers and the Bila fisher-farmers. Ingold follows Turnbull in seeing the Bila farmers as culturally conditioned to fear the forest, and seeing the Mbuti as culturally conditioned to experience the forest as a benevolent parent whom they can trust.

Turnbull's research, however, coincided with the most effective period of Belgian colonial domination, which treated the villagers and the Mbuti very differently. The Mbuti were allowed to move through the forest freely, while the Bila were forced to move their villages to the roadside and to pay taxes in the form of maintaining the roads, feeding immigrant labourers, and growing cotton to pay as a form of tax (Turnbull 1983: 60). Having to manipulate the Mbuti into working their fields to help produce the required cotton was the last in a long chain of exploitative extractive relations emanating from commercial decisions made in Europe, and made possible by colonial control.

Although Mbuti-Bila relations under Belgian rule can be seen as being largely shaped by the Bila's desperate need for Mbuti labour in their cotton plantations to meet tax demands, and by the Mbuti refusal to be drawn into this subservient role, in fact this perspective denies the importance of agency in terms of how people chose to relate to each other. For example, those Bila chiefs who were desperate to control Mbuti labour to help harvest cotton were unable to find and control them, whereas those chiefs who maintained relations of autonomy had no such difficulty. Turnbull (e.g. 1965: 41) shows how, despite the immense pressures on the Bila to exploit the Mbuti to meet tax demands, the Bila benefited from maintaining relationships of equality and interdependence with the Mbuti just as meat traders in the central Ituri do today. With central government weak or nonexistent, economic relations between the Mbuti and villagers during my fieldwork were not shaped by the tax demands of colonisation, but mediated through the meat trade (Kenrick 1996). Village traders spent long periods of time in Mbuti hunting camps, where they would exchange trade items and produce from their fields for antelope hunted by the Mbuti. The traders' success often depended on how intimate and personal their relationship was with the Mbuti in camp; and this system, whereby everything which the Mbuti want but cannot obtain from the forest is transported in by traders, enabled the Mbuti to stay in the forest for as long as they wished while still having access to village produce and goods.

Thus the relations between the Bila and the Mbuti are better understood by looking at the processes whereby relationships are established – on the basis of inclusion and equality, or on the basis of domination and inequality – rather than by assuming some underlying cultural given of opposition. A preoccupation with Turnbull's structural opposition obscures the dynamic movement between forest and village that was central to Mbuti

and Bila relations in Turnbull's day despite his attempt to reproduce the impact of colonial divisiveness as if it represented underlying mutually exclusive cosmologies.

The point being that a huge amount of effort has to go into creating and maintaining systems of inequality, just as a huge amount of effort has to go into creating and maintaining systems of equality. Clearly one of the best ways to maintain a system of inequality is to persuade those participating in it that it is a natural state of affairs, and/or preferable to whatever might befall if the hierarchy was to be seriously questioned. In a powerful echo of the anthropologist cited by Feit – who saw the construction of huge hydro-electric development as having the potential to create in the Cree a wish for European 'development' that would be 'an active wish, something felt' (Bertrand, cited in Feit 2004) – a letter from a Belgian administrator in the Ituri to his District Commissioner (written in 1912) stated that: 'This region needs to be worked directly by European traders; they are the only ones who will create needs among the natives' (cited in Grinker 1994: 42). Clearly, the creation of an internal state of dependence, an active *need*, is central to enabling processes of discrimination and inequality to become self-enforcing rather than having to be continually enforced from outside. For the same reason, resisting internalising such a state is central to maintaining the equalising processes that are central both to egalitarian hunter-gatherer societies and to maintaining relations of equality in any society.

If, at the heart of capitalism there is the creation of needs, then this creation of needs is clearly at the heart of the colonial enterprise as well. Analyses of oppression often ignore the way oppression is worked through the creation of a sense of dependency, an acceptance of a peripheral position of power within a larger system (Bloch 1992), a position that involves both an abdication of power – in the sense that one relinquishes the ability to engage in self-directed interactions with autonomous others – and involves becoming an embodiment of power. At its extreme, one becomes dominated by (and subservient to) the need to dominate others. This was evident in my fieldwork in the Ituri whenever people became caught in broader political processes of wealth-extraction (such as those involved in gold panning or in having to respond to the corrupt national administration).

Reframing relationships of equality as relationships of power and control in order to try to deflect or meet extractive demands from more powerful others, is not simply evident in the Ituri but is a process that effects us all, for example in the audit culture of academic management, which requires a representation of self in the very particular forms and language demanded of us (Strathern 2000). James Ron (1997: 279) cites cultural theorist, Ann Swidler, as arguing that social actors:

[O]ften voluntarily change their behavior – or at least appear to do so – in response to changes in public symbols. As the environment changes, some forms of behavior become stigmatised while others become acceptable. Actors seeking to boost their reputations will want to reflect the new criteria for evaluation, even if they do not believe in the substantive value of the new symbols themselves.

'What governs action in this case', Swidler points out, 'is not individuals' internalized beliefs, but their knowledge of what meanings their actions have for others' (Ron 1997: 279).

In contrast to Rossi – who writes that in such contexts ‘Hierarchy is recognised by less powerful actors who use (instrumentally or subversively) dominant definitions to pursue their own agendas’ (2004: 23) – Swidler points out that this ‘Hypocrisy has real effects on actual behavior because in order to appear legitimate, some real changes need to be made’ (Ron 1997: 279). Thus when we re-present ourselves in ways that fit into the penetratingly exclusive categories of those who believe they are imposing necessary hierarchical order on an otherwise supposedly chaotic or stagnant social world, there is a real question as to whether in instrumentally advancing our interests, we lose our fundamental ability to relate as the equals we are.

In relation to parallel processes of domination and discrimination, which work their way down from broader hierarchical systems into Mbuti society, the Mbuti maintain equality through equally powerful processes (Kenrick 2005: 118–21). For example, they experience themselves as having the right to demand their share if they are lacking something, and if someone else has more than enough of anything than they currently need. The key point here is that rather than this happening in their own separate social world, which is set up in some Barthian opposition to the opposing category of Bila farmers or European anthropologists who do not share in this way, the Mbuti extend this understanding to everyone. They expect everyone to share in this way, and they expect to share with anyone who demands their right to a share (see also Woodburn 1982: 448).

Thus, demand-sharing does not stand alone, but is embedded in an attitude of inclusiveness which informs their relations with everybody. Demands on fellow Mbuti with conspicuous excess were at least as strong as demands on villagers or myself: objects acquired from me would quickly and easily be passed on to others who, in their turn, had demanded them, and once I learnt to make appropriate demands I could secure my share. Endless demands are an aspect of this inclusiveness which subverts any attempt by someone seeking to maintain a position of power through giving gifts to those with less and thereby seeking to establish in them a sense of indebtedness.

One could simply interpret these as strategies to resist those seeking to take power (Wilmsen 1999: 17), and this would be right, but only from the point of view of those seeking to take power (cf. Ingold on managers and workers different perspectives in the factory [2000: 331–3]). From the point of view of people like the Mbuti (Kenrick 2005) or Mbendjelle (Lewis 2005), what they are seeking are relationships of equality with all others. A sense of equality with other humans grounded in their experience of equality with the persons (human and non-human) who they relate to on a daily basis.

## **In conclusion: Unthinking eurocentrism, rethinking egalitarianism**

Where, from the perspective of category-dualism, *indigenous* is a claim made by some to exclude others, from the perspective of these egalitarian indigenous peoples, their claim to a share is not only about the political redressing of historical injustice, nor only about the insistence that they be included in, but is also about insisting that we are all included in a world in which the work of building alliances to name and subvert domination, and to claim and assert equality, is a task that none can leave to others.

My argument, then, is that to more effectively support marginalised peoples who identify themselves as indigenous, we need to move away from the category definitions which Kuper criticises, and we need to move away from the category opposition that Ingold tends to implicitly reproduce between egalitarian hunter-gatherer and Western worldviews. In place of these supposedly apolitical perspectives, the need is to shift our attention from a preoccupation with categories to a focus on processes. This involves no longer seeking to separate politics and science, but instead re-imagining and re-invigorating an approach to political relations and scientific enquiry based on the practice of equality. This would involve taking our cue from the indigenous peoples Ingold discusses, and developing the political and personal skills needed to defuse processes of exclusion and appropriation by identifying, disentangling and supporting those processes which continually recreate space for mutuality.

To understand the centrality of mutuality, not only in predominantly egalitarian societies but also in our own, is perhaps best achieved through direct engagement in collective endeavours to recover the world from the inevitable division and despoliation that results from the mistaken dualistic insistence that order must be imposed by the *superior* realm onto the *inferior*, and that results from its inability to recognise that order emerges out of an engagement of equals.

Van Gennep was surely right to suggest that ethnography can be the foundation upon which a new understanding of humanity can be based, precisely because of the way it allies itself with the destabilising of assumed categories through its recognition that the world is made collectively through an alliance of *agentful* beings, whether they recognise their agency or not.

Janelle Taylor writes that:

What ethnography as practice and mode of analysis unsettles ... anthropology as discipline and profession restores. Anthropologists remains always 'anthropologists of', ambiguously positioned as experts who specialise in research and writings that seek to dismantle and dissolve the very same objects on whose coherence and persistence their professional identity and expertise in some sense depends (2005: 741).

As practicing ethnographers and anthropologists – or as other producers of our social world – we have to negotiate our way through hierarchical structures. However, alongside being persuaded to collude in systems of penetratingly exclusive power, daily practices of mutuality and resistance run like a stream through our own experience as much as through those in egalitarian social systems who seek to cope with the impact of penetratingly exclusive power.

Unthinking Eurocentric dualism – and re-imagining and re-invigorating an approach to political relations and scientific enquiry based on the practice of equality – could simply mean recognising that democracy and science are not primarily institutions, slogans or signifiers of superiority. Instead they are the daily practice of keeping lines of communication open in order to enable knowledge to be generated and decisions to be made

collectively, on the basis of people's awareness of the state of a world that is constantly in flux. If democracy and science are simply asserted as signifiers of superiority in opposition to a *backward* or threatening other, then they lose their central ability to challenge our most fundamental assumptions and to re-orientate our relationship with the world.

Freed from their Eurocentric bias, democracy and science embody the central egalitarian principles and practices which enable us to generate genuinely positive change and understanding, through connecting us with – rather than dividing us from – other peoples, species and our species life. Making this a reality rather than a slogan itself involves a continual re-establishment of alliances with agentful others who wish to participate in the messy dismantling and dissolving of hierarchies which themselves both depend (and depend on denying their dependency on) the mutual nature of the contingent and continually collectively constructed world.

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## **POVZETEK**

Prispevek preučuje politične razloge in posledice pisanja Adama Kuperja in Tima Ingolda o egalitarnih domorodnih ljudstvih. Osredotoča se na preprosto vprašanje: kako lahko tisti, ki živimo v hierarhičnih družbah, razumemo interakcijo med hierarhičnimi sistemi in sistemi tistih ljudi, ki živijo v pretežno egalitarnih kontekstih? Prispevek sledi zgodovinskemu nasledstvu Kuperjevih argumentov, da takšni ljudje delajo napako, ko poskušajo povrnitev svojih pravic uveljaviti prek predstavljanja samih sebe kot domorodnih prebivalcev. Hkrati preučuje način, na katerega želi Ingold odmisлити evropocentrične predpostavke, ki zavračajo predpostavke teh ljudi kot znanstveno netočne. Prispevek kaže, da utemeljitev Ingoldove analize v zavedanju političnih bojev, lahko pripomore k nastanku političnega prostora, v katerem si je mogoče ponovno zamisliti politične odnose in znanstveno raziskovanje, ki temeljita na praksah enakosti.

**Ključne besede:** egalitarizem, evropocentrizem, domorodna ljudstva, lovci in nabiralci, dualizem, znanost, upor, mit o plemenitem divjaku, Ingold, Kuper

**CORRESPONDENCE:** JUSTIN KENRICK, University of Edinburgh, Social Anthropology, School of Social and Political Science, Chrystal Macmillan Building, Edinburgh, EH8 9LD, Scotland. E-mail: justinkenrick@yahoo.co.uk.