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____Melissa Woytek Rice_____   __May 15, 2012____

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Abstract

India's forests are home to half of the world's tiger population and to millions of people. While conservationists clamor for reserves for the endangered Bengal tiger, forest people oppose any attempts to displace them from their homes. Most of these people identify as "indigenous" and rely on forest resources for their livelihood. For 200 years, the Indian state has tried to prevent them from accessing forests, claiming they degrade ecosystems and threaten wildlife. In contrast, indigenous activists and their allies in non-governmental organizations (NGOs) claim that indigenous people are the legitimate protectors of tigers who have been dispossessed by a corrupt state. The Forest Rights Act of 2006 recognized, for the first time, the rights of forest dwellers. It allows indigenous people to claim communal and individual rights to farm, graze animals, and harvest non-timber resources in government-owned forests. But the Forest Rights Act has been implemented unevenly and is frequently violated, especially in tiger reserves.[1] Government officials continue to harass indigenous people and evict them, treating tigers as a uniquely endangered species whose protection precludes the rights guaranteed to people under the Forest Rights Act.

Most decisions about resource control depend on what narratives officials believe are true.[2] Narratives provide simplified accounts of complex environmental interactions. They unfold in storybook form, with a beginning, a central problem, and a suggested solution.[3] In India, where the national government operates in English and Hindi, the stories that English-language popular media and NGOs publish about tiger conservation influence how policy

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[1] National Committee on Forest Rights Act. 2010. Report of MoEF-MoTA joint committee on Forest Rights Act implementation and future forest policy. Government of India.

[2] Robbins, Paul. 2004. Construction of nature: Environmental knowledges and imaginaries. In Political ecology: Acritical introduction. 1st ed., 107-126. Malden, MA: Blackwell.

[3] Roe, Emery. 1994. Narrative policy analysis: Theory and practice. Durham: Duke University Press.

makers implement laws. I will present an analysis of narratives in 50 samples from newspapers, magazines, NGOs and indigenous people's organizations, specifically focusing on: What stories are people telling about tiger conservation and indigenous people? How do these stories explain tiger decline? How do they describe indigenous people? I will also discuss the implications of these narratives and how they fit into the political context of tiger conservation.

In the Name of the Tiger: Narrative Analysis on Conservation and Indigenous
Forest Rights in India

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May 2012

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Acknowledgements

"How dare you blame us for a climate crisis? It is the product of un-natural practices, and it has devastated our lives… Now you want us out of our habitats in the name of conserving our forests! You kill, unsparingly, relish in "terrorizing" busts of tigers, decorating your mantelpiece – all pointing to your moral sensibility – and yet you have the audacity to tell us to leave the forests so that you can protect the tigers! What law do you know? Who are you to teach what is legal? You are illegal – contradicting the very law of nature – of coexistence."

National Forum of Forest Peoples and Forest Workers

Dehradun, India, June 2009

Introduction

The goal of this thesis is to explore the narratives surrounding indigenous rights and conservation in India's tiger reserves. India's forests are home to millions of people and to more than half of the world's tiger population (Springate-Baginski et al. 2009; Wright 2010). While conservationists clamor for human-free conservation areas for the endangered Bengal tiger, indigenous forest people oppose any attempts to displace them from their homes. The Forest Rights Act of 2006, which entered into force in 2008, recognizes indigenous people's rights in tiger reserves. The amended Wild Life (Protection) Act of 2006 also requires that the government obtain local consent when declaring new reserves. But officials across India have ignored these laws.

Actors use different stories – narratives – to explain the conflict over resource rights in tiger reserves. News media and conservation organizations tell stories of indigenous people poaching tigers or destroying their habitat through overuse. Since tigers and people cannot coexist, the government should relocate the people. Meanwhile, some conservation organizations suggest leaving people in place but convincing them, through ecodevelopment programs, to reduce their use of forest resources. Finally, indigenous rights activists recount an entirely different story. They claim that indigenous people have, historically, lived successfully alongside tigers. They blame the Indian Forest Department for disrupting human-tiger coexistence by taking over indigenous land; this expropriation destroyed indigenous people's livelihoods and their once sustainable resource use patterns. The resolution of this story will occur when the Forest Department steps aside and lets indigenous people manage tiger reserves.

The narratives that government officials embrace influence how they manage tiger reserves and implement the Forest Rights Act (FRA) and Wild Life (Protection) Act (WLPA).

Narratives are important because they legitimate claims to resources and frame how laws are understood. They affect who ultimately receives forest rights. This paper explores the English-language narratives that popular press and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) use to discuss indigenous people and tiger conservation.

I learned about India's indigenous forest people in 2010, while interning at Janaagraha, an urban governance NGO in Bangalore, Karnataka, India. The Indian English-language newspapers published frequent articles about the FRA and its effects on indigenous people and endangered species. These articles cast the law as a historic reversal in forest policy, and one which legitimizes the presence of people whom the government once blamed for forest degradation. The FRA sets up a process for recognizing the rights of indigenous people in government-owned forests including tiger reserves. It guarantees their rights to land, pasturage, non-timber forest products (NTFPs), and other resources. When I returned to Mount Holyoke College, I studied the role of markets in popular press narratives about the FRA.

I returned to India in 2011, and I volunteered for the Vivekananda Girijana Kalyana Kendra, an indigenous peoples' development organization in Biligiri Ranganathaswamy Temple (BRT) Tiger Reserve in Karnataka. The reserve is home to tigers, elephants, gaur, sambar deer, and other endangered species — and to thousands of indigenous Soliga people. Having read about the FRA, I expected to observe recognition of Soligas' rights in the reserve. I found the local government had granted only individual land rights and was threatening to rescind those few rights in the name of saving the tiger.

C. Made Gowda, a Soliga leader and researcher with the Ashoka Trust on Research in Ecology and the Environment, explained the situation: The central government had declared BRT, once a wildlife sanctuary, a "tiger reserve" without consent from local people. Forest

Department officials told the Soligas living inside the reserve, who had just received land rights, that they would not be able to access forest resources anymore.[4] The Soliga political interest groups –Soligara Abhivruddhi Sanghas – and allied NGOs protested and proposed an alternative plan which would allow the Soligas to conserve the tigers *in situ*. The Ministry of Environment and Forests ignored the proposal, but the head of the Ministry personally promised not to evict them (Nandy July 2011).

Soligas have been struggling against the Forest Department's excesses for years, enduring abuses both extrajudicial and under the auspices of conservation law. When the central government first declared this region a wildlife sanctuary in 1974, the Department used elephants to raze their homes and forced them to move. It banned shifting cultivation, which forced families into poverty. Moneylenders who had lent money to Soligas enslaved thousands of people as bonded laborers, until the Vivekananda Girijana Kalyana Kendra agitated for their release in the 1990s. The Forest Department never fully prevented Soligas from accessing NTFPs but would sometimes force them to perform free labor in return for that access (Veena N., Prashanth N.S. and Vasuki B.K. 2006; Made Gowda 2011).

From talking with members of the Soligara Abhivruddhi Sanghas in 2011, I learned that Soligas are now well-organized politically and connected to NGOs and elected officials. But they still have limited rights to their homeland and their livelihoods. They are subject to the whims of the Forest Department, which has allowed, banned, allowed, banned, and then allowed again NTFP harvest from 2004 to 2011. Although relations with the Department have improved, officials continue to accuse Soligas of encroaching on forest land and degrading the forest

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[4] The Soligas living in and around BRT received individual land rights in January 2010 and communal resource and conservation rights in October 2011. The central government declared it a tiger reserve in January 2011, while the FRA claims process was still in progress (Made Gowda 2011; Nagaraju 2011).

(Nagaraju 2011). Meanwhile, the Department ignores the environmental impacts of the commercial coffee plantations in the heart of BRT. By early 2011, the Department was once again threatening to ban NTFP harvest. I could not comprehend what the Department had planned – the exclusion of a community that had just received rights under FRA. The National Committee on Forest Rights Act found similar situations in other tiger reserves across India (National Committee on Forest Rights Act 2010).

This thesis is my attempt to grapple with the disparity between laws which guarantee indigenous people's rights to forest resources and the reality of loss of access in tiger reserves. The central and state governments designate new tiger reserves without the required local consent and sharply curtail access to those reserves. By exploring the publications produced about tiger conservation and indigenous people, I identify the narratives that government, indigenous people, and NGOs use to legitimate their claims to forests.

My research questions are:

1) What different narratives do popular magazines, newspapers, and NGOs publish about indigenous people and tiger conservation? Because I am interested in narratives in the context of the recent legislative reform, I also ask the following sub-questions:

    a. How do actors invoke "rights," the FRA, WLPA, or other laws in these narratives?

    b. How do actors explain the decline of the tiger?

2) Do these narratives essentialize indigenous peoples?

    a. How do narratives describe indigenous people?

Background

This chapter covers the historical, social and legal context in which narratives about tiger conservation and indigenous people unfold. Beginning the British colonizers' expropriation of the forest commons, India's rulers have consistently marginalized indigenous people by criminalizing their use of forests. The independent government of India further tightened access to forests by blaming local people for harming the Bengal tiger. But the Forest Rights Act and the "Tiger Amendment" to the Wild Life (Protection) Act, both passed in 2006, reversed this trend, recognizing indigenous people's forest rights and providing some legal protection against eviction for tiger conservation. However, the government has repeatedly violated both laws in declaring new reserves and restricting access to them.

"Indigenous" People

India is home to 84 million people officially recognized in the Constitution as "Scheduled Tribes" (STs) and an unknown number who identify as "tribal" or "indigenous" but who do not have ST status. These groups have their own unique languages and religious practices. Some activists argue that these "tribes" have long been separate from mainstream Indian society and lived in self-governing communities at the frontiers of ancient empires (Bijoy 2003). Others claim the distinction between "tribal" and "non-tribal" is a purely colonial construction (Karlsson 2000). It is beyond the scope of this paper to debate the historical origins of these groups.

Regardless of ancient commonalities, these communities are united by more recent history: the British colonizers declared them "Backward and Primitive Tribes" in the 19th century based on anthropological surveys. The British organized these surveys to tax Indians efficiently,

since "…administration at minimal cost in the frontier areas, forests, or hill tracts, depended on good information about tribal society" (Karlsson 2000, 27). The British categorized certain groups as "tribal" based on their own views of cultural sophistication: "tribals" were people who practiced shifting agriculture, hunting-gathering, or other "primitive" livelihoods in remote areas.

Although patronizing toward all Indians, the British saw "tribals" as particularly backwards, incapable of reform even if exposed to the "civilizing" influence of British education. While they established British schools, promoted British culture, and recruited native civil servants from cities, they made few interventions in "tribal" areas. These colonial policies created a clear tribal/non-tribal divide in society (Karlsson 2000).

Over the years, some groups have reclaimed the "tribal" label as a marker of their unique cultures, while others have rejected it because it implies inferiority. In the late 1930s, "tribal" activists in central India adopted the Hindi term "*adivasi*" instead. Literally meaning "original inhabitant," *adivasi* carries an implicit claim of indigeneity (Damodaran 2006; Burman 2009). Since the 1930s, groups across India have asserted their indigeneity in struggles for resource rights expropriated by the Indian state (Damodaran 2006; Cederlof and Sivaramakrishnan 2006; Burman 2009). This links them to the global indigenous movement. Because "indigenous" is the most recent term that these communities use to self-identify, I use the term in this paper.[5]

After independence, the government continued to marginalize indigenous Indians, as it developed heavy industry in cities and neglected rural areas. The government retained the "Backward and Primitive Tribes" category but renamed it "Scheduled Tribes." Today,

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[5] Due to migrations, many "indigenous" groups are not actually autochthonous to their current homeland. I use this term for simplicity and not to endorse the historical validity of their claims. I prefer "indigenous" over the other options; some indigenous groups consider "tribal" and "*adivasi*" to be insulting, and the "Scheduled Tribe" label does not include all self-identified indigenous groups.

approximately 84% of STs live in forested areas[6] (World Bank 2006). Although eligible for certain affirmative action benefits, such as reserved seats in universities and government jobs, most STs have limited access to education or employment. Poverty is high in areas with high ST populations, where the government has provided little infrastructure (Springate-Baginski et al. 2009).

Losing Access to the Forest

In the 18th century, the British rulers of India replaced complex communal tenure arrangements with state-run forestry. Before they arrived, most villages managed local forests communally with some intervention from princely rulers (Springate-Baginski et al. 2007). Many communities had agreements known as *nistar* with nearby rulers, which allowed them to collect forest products for household consumption (Baviskar 2003; Springate-Baginski et al. 2007).

The colonial government was unfamiliar with and unsympathetic to these customary tenure arrangements. When the British crown assumed direct control over India from the East India Company, it expropriated forests and forest resources through a series of laws. Under the 1878 Forest Law, the British empire claimed most of the forest commons, exempting only areas under continuous cultivation which it considered private property (Menzies 2007). The goal of colonial forest management was to produce hardwood for international trade. The newly-formed Imperial Forest Department tried to prevent people from felling trees but never succeeded in extending complete control. People remained living in the forests, and they harvested resources when they could.

After independence, the Indian government continued to tighten access to government-owned forests. It managed forests with an emphasis on timber production and raw materials for

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[6] Because the Indian government conducts censuses according to the ST list, there is no population data on communities that identify as "indigenous" but are not on the ST list.

industry. In 1970s, in response to international and domestic calls to protect its wildlife, the government designated certain forest areas for conservation. Three categories of government forest emerged: two categories of protected areas for conservation (national parks and wildlife sanctuaries) and general reserve forests. The government passed the Wild Life (Protection) Act (WLPA) in 1972. The WLPA imposed stiff penalties for trading endangered animal products, formalized the system of national parks and wildlife sanctuaries, and banned people from hunting, farming or living in national parks and wildlife sanctuaries (Government of India 1993, Ch 3). The 1980 Conservation of Forests Act banned timber felling and extraction of most resources from wildlife sanctuaries and national parks (Prabhu 2001).

Like its imperial predecessor, the Forest Department failed to enforce these laws completely and many people continued to use forests for farmland, resources, and animal grazing. But if caught, they faced penalties under the WLPA and the Conservation of Forests Act. The Forest Department regarded indigenous people as a threat to their forest management strategy and to their new responsibility to conserve wildlife. The criminalization of forest access impoverished many forest communities (Pimple and Sethi 2005). In spite of their punitive policy for local users, the Ministry of Environment and Forests (MoEF) routinely approved corporate requests to extract resources from government forests. It ceded 80 million hectares for industrial projects between 1980 and 2008 (Krishnaswamy 2008, n.p.).

Today, at least 200 million Indians live in government forests and/or derive a substantial portion of their income from them (Springate-Baginski et al. 2009, 10). National parks and wildlife sanctuaries alone are home to approximately four million people (Kothari 2008, n.p.). These forest-dwelling people are usually indigenous or members of low Hindu castes (Springate-Baginski et al. 2009). While MoEF continues to grant corporate concessions to clear forests, the

Forest Department charges local people for violating the Conservation of Forests Act or WLPA, depriving them of resources necessary for their material and cultural survival. The government has been particularly strict in protected areas, where wildlife tourism is an economic driver and the government sees local people as potential poachers.

Regaining Access

The indigenous people's movement successfully lobbied for a bill that legitimizes the presence of people in the forest: The Scheduled Tribes and Other Traditional Forest Dwellers (Recognition of Forest Rights) Act, known as the Forest Rights Act (FRA). Passed in 2006, it came into force in 2008. The FRA allows STs and other traditional forest dwellers to claim individual and communal land titles, as well as communal use rights to NTFPs, water bodies, and pasturage (Government of India 2007, Ch. 2, 3(1)a-m). They can also claim rights to NTFPs based on centuries-old, pre-colonial *nistar* agreements, in which local princely leaders allowed communities to collect NTFPs. Finally, they can claim communal rights to manage and protect areas. Whoever receives land or use rights under the FRA has the duty "…to protect wildlife, the forest, and biodiversity…" and the local watershed (Government of India 2007, 5(a-b)). However, the Act offers little information about how forest dwellers will do this, referring merely to their "traditional" systems of forest regeneration, conservation or management (Government of India 2007, 3(1)i). The law allows the felling of a limited number of trees for government hospitals, irrigation works, schools, roads, and other infrastructure (Government of India 2007, Ch 2, 3(2) a-m). Finally, a 2009 MoEF circular declared that no forest dweller can be displaced for an industrial project or government conservation plan until the FRA claims process has been finished in her district (MoEF 2009).

The implementation of the FRA is extremely decentralized, built upon the principle of village self-rule. Claimants file their applications for rights, with details about the extent of property or resource use, to the *gram sabha*, the council of all adults in the village. The *gram sabha* recommends applications to a *taluk*-level committee which includes people from several *gram sabha* and officials from the Forest and Tribal Welfare Departments. The *taluk* committee passes its recommendations to the district-level committee (Government of India 2007, 6; Campaign for Survival and Dignity 2010). This committee includes community members and government officials, and the officials wield considerable influence over whose claims are recognized and whose are not. A state-level committee formulates the criteria for evaluating claims and provides tools such as GPS devices and forms in the vernacular language.

The implementation of this law has been extremely slow, with few rights recognized. The National Committee on Forest Rights Act, commissioned by the central government, found state-level committees have not provided the necessary tools or guidance. Nationwide, the committees are rejecting large numbers of claims. They have recognized the individual land rights of some STs but rejected non-ST claimants. Almost no communities have received communal rights (National Committee on Forest Rights Act 2010). Communal rights are antithetical to the Forest Department's traditional understanding of forest resources as either government-owned or individual private property. The Committee's findings corroborate press and indigenous people's reports of incomplete implementation and in some cases, obstruction of the claims process by the Forest Department (Sinha 2010; Campaign for Survival and Dignity 2010; Bhaya and Pathak 2011).

Tigers in the Forest

India is home to the Bengal tiger, *Panthera tigris tigris*. These tigers, numbering around 1,706 individuals, account for the majority of the world's wild tiger population (National Tiger Conservation Authority 2011, 1; Wright 2010). Their conservation is the focus of international and domestic advocacy and domestic conservation policy. Millions of dollars, from Indian and international sources, flow into tiger reserves (Bijoy 2010; Obalesh 2011). From 2008 to 2010 alone, the central government's funding for tiger conservation doubled to Rs. 1.84 billion or $37 million (Press Trust of India Jan 2010, n.p.).[7] Over a 30-year period, the government spent Rs. 2.37 million on each tiger in the country (Tiger Task Force 2006, 17). That amounts to $1,555 per tiger per year.[8] In comparison, the government spent just $197 per child per year for primary education in 2006, and $361 per child for secondary education (UNESCO Institute for Statistics 2010, n.p.).[9] Conservation NGOs' campaigns to "save the tiger" also net substantial donations and media attention.

However, tigers were not always prized in India. In the early 20th century, British and Indian elites hunted them for sport. For about 30 years after independence, the government permitted tiger hunting. Hunting, poisoning in retaliation for livestock killing, habitat destruction and disturbance, and decline of prey species decimated the population (Khandelwal 2005). By 1972, there were fewer than 2,000 tigers left, and conservationists, largely from abroad, pressured the Indian government to protect the species (Wright 2010). Their efforts spurred the passage of the WLPA under the auspices of Prime Minister Indira Gandhi. The first comprehensive wildlife legislation in India, the WLPA banned anyone from hunting, farming or

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[7] Based on February 2012 exchange rates.
[8] 1 *lakh* equals 100,000. Rs. 23.7 *lakh* divided by 30 is Rs. 79,000, which equals $1555 US according to March 2012 exchange rates.
[9] Adjusted for purchasing power parity.

living in protected areas (Government of India 1993, Ch 3). It tightened the existing restrictions on forests, leading the Forest Department to reduce local people's access to resources (Kothari, Pathak, and Bose 2009).

Since that time, international politics have played a major role in tiger conservation. After the WLPA passed, a trustee of the international NGO World Wildlife Fund (WWF) offered Prime Minister Gandhi's government a million dollars for a special project to save tigers, and she committed an equal amount from her government (Wright 2010, 89; WWF 2012). Using this money, the government created Project Tiger in 1973. It began with just nine tiger reserves; today there are 39 (Bijoy 2011, 37). The reserves are generally contiguous with the boundaries of national parks, but others span national parks, wildlife sanctuaries, and general reserve forest. WWF remains involved in the fate of India's protected areas and its people. In 1993, WWF and other NGOs sued the Indian government for falling to enforce the WLPA (Dowie 2009).

The early administrators of Project Tiger assumed that tigers need a "core" area with no human disturbance to survive. Since tigers are at the top of the food chain, they anticipated that the government would automatically protect a range of prey species and all forest cover needed to support those species by setting aside land for tigers (Khandelwal 2006). Numerous scientific studies have challenged that assumption, including a 2011 study that found tiger populations increasing in the human-disturbed landscapes in South India (Karanth et al. 2011). In the parliamentary debate over the FRA in 2005, supporters of human-free conservation areas argued that land rights would lead to massive deforestation and compromise the safety of wildlife, especially tigers (Thapar 2008; Sahgal and Scarlott 2010; Wright 2010). Although the 2006 Project Tiger Task Force report emphasized community conservation, many influential

conservationists, such as the Task Force's dissenting member Valmik Thapar, argue that tigers require human-free areas (Tiger Task Force 2006).

Conserving the tiger remains a challenge regardless of civil society support. The tiger population increased from 2006 to 2010 but remains below 1972 levels (National Tiger Conservation Authority 2011). The central government releases funds erratically so tiger reserve staff cannot always spend the money within the fiscal year (Khandelwal 2005). Reserves are generally understaffed and employees lack adequate training. Government-approved dams and roads have carved out chunks of tiger habitat (Wildlife Protection Society of India "Current" 2012). High demand for tiger products, particularly in traditional Chinese medicine, entices people to poach them, and poaching networks operate throughout India's forests with help from some indigenous communities and little interference from police (Wright 2010; Wildlife Protection Society of India "Poaching" 2012). In Sariska Tiger Reserve, poaching, traffic to a nearby temple, goat grazing, and mismanagement led to the total extinction of tigers in 2005 (Tiger Task Force 2006). Tigers disappeared from Panna Tiger Reserve in 2009.

The 2006 "Tiger Amendment" to the WLPA formalized Project Tiger and created new protections for indigenous people in tiger reserves, requiring the government to respect their rights. The amendment created a legal definition for tiger reserves: areas inside national parks or wildlife sanctuaries, composed of a "…core or critical tiger habitat area … where it has been established, on the basis of scientific and objective criteria, that such areas are required to be kept as *inviolate* for the purposes of tiger conservation, *without affecting the rights of the Scheduled Tribes or such other forest dwellers*…" and a buffer area surrounding the core (Government of India 2006, 38V, emphasis added). This "core" is also called the "critical tiger habitat." Thus, the definition of "tiger reserve" stipulates that the government respects local people's rights.

The WLPA amendment requires that the government obtain consent of the local people in numerous ways before it can designate the "inviolate" core of the tiger reserve. Section 38V(5) of the WLPA (2006) states that no part of a tiger reserve can be made "inviolate" until:

1) the FRA claims process is complete

2) the state government, in consultation with an independent social and ecological scientist, and with the consent and consultation of local *gram sabha*, establishes that humans pose irreversible damage to tigers and that local human-tiger coexistence is impossible

3) all affected *gram sabha* give written, informed consent to their resettlement

4) *gram sabha* give written approval to a resettlement package

5) the government relocates people and provides everything promised in the resettlement package

MoEF has not defined "inviolate." The Forest Department usually interprets it as "human-free" while indigenous peoples' NGOs claim it means "free of uses that compromise conservation goals" (ATREE et al. June 2011). But since the amendment also forbids forced relocation, the Forest Department cannot legally enforce its vision of completely human-free core zones unless everyone consents to leave.

Despite these rules, the government has repeatedly violated the amended WLPA in its haste to declare new tiger reserves. From 2007 to 2010, the number of reserves rose from 22 to 39 (Bijoy 2010, n.p.). Since the FRA claims process has not concluded anywhere in India, altering people's rights in tiger reserves violates both the FRA and the WLPA. Furthermore, state governments have failed to produce proof of any written *gram sabha* consent to relocation or resettlement packages (Bhaya and Pathak 2011). The central government has approved these

tiger reserve declarations in spite of the countless violations and provides funding for the Forest Department to evict people from core zones (National Committee on Forest Rights Act 2010).

Indigenous people and other people living in these new tiger reserves are protesting the declarations. The Soligas, an ST in Karnataka, recently won communal NTFP rights in the core zone of Biligiri Ranganathaswamy Temple Tiger Reserve. However, the government has not rescinded the core zone designation which was done without Soliga consent. Nationwide, the Forest Department is cutting off people's access to forest produce, denying FRA claims, harassing them and pressuring them to leave protected conservation areas, particularly tiger reserves (National Committee on Forest Rights Act 2010; Bijoy 2011; Bhaya and Pathak 2011). In short, the rights recognized in the FRA and the amended WLPA conflict with the reality of dispossession of indigenous people in tiger reserves.

Multilateral agencies have also entered into this struggle over tiger reserves. In 2008, the World Bank and Global Environment Facility created the Global Tiger Initiative (GTI), which aims to fight tiger decline with international consultation and market-based funding (World Bank 2008). GTI's members are multilateral funding agencies, governments of tiger countries, and NGOs from many nations. GTI claims that conserving tiger habitats will help economic growth by protecting valuable ecosystem services and promoting tiger tourism (GTI "Themes" 2012). It touts its partnerships with multinational companies, declaring the "Private Sector is the Missing Piece of the Tiger Conservation Puzzle" (GTI "Private" 2012, n.p.). It also adopts a version of conservation science consonant with the Indian Forest Department's idea: "…actions to protect tigers in their natural habitats will automatically lead to global benefits for biological diversity" (GTI "Themes" 2012, n.p.). The effect of GTI in India's tiger reserves is unclear as the initiative

is relatively new, but the entry of more multinational companies and NGOs into tiger

conservation debates signals increased international scrutiny of and funding for India's reserves.

Conclusion

Indigenous residents of tiger reserves enjoy almost none of the rights and benefits

promised to them under recent legislative reform. The FRA recognizes their rights to live in and

use resources in reserves, while the WLPA set up stringent requirements for relocating people or

altering rights in the core zone of tiger reserves. Although the FRA was passed six years ago and

has been in force for four years, the government has only recognized a fraction of the rights that

people claim in protected areas. Foreign NGOs remains influential in tiger conservation

programs, while the new GTI has claimed India's tigers as part of a global heritage. The result is

an ongoing struggle among forest-dwelling people, NGOs, and government to claim rights to

India's forest resources. In order to understand the current struggle over resources and rights in

tiger reserves, it is necessary to examine how Indians read and write about this struggle –

through an examination of narratives.

Literature Review

Narratives, far from being mere stories, have an important effect on environmental decision-making. This chapter covers the literature on environmental narratives, their features and their role in environmental discourses.[10] The hegemonic narrative about conservation in India essentializes indigenous people as ignorant and poor, destroying forest cover and poaching endangered animals. The Indian government is the hero who relocates the environment-destroying locals and creates human-free areas where flora and fauna flourish. At the same time, indigenous people also use cultural essentialism, claiming a unique knowledge of the environment that legitimizes their claims to resource rights in government-controlled areas. In the past two decades, the realization that human-free areas have not successfully protected forests or animals has led to an explosion of community conservation legislation worldwide. However, in India, the legal reforms of the Forest Rights Act and Wild Life (Protection) Act have not led to substantially increased access for indigenous people.

Narrative

In his 2004 book, political ecologist Paul Robbins writes, "Control over resources is commonly not adjudicated by whether overgrazing, erosion or biodiversity decline is actually occurring in the landscape, but rather by the *accounts* of environmental conditions and change that are as held as true by decision-makers, local people, and competing interests" (emphasis original, 113). These accounts – these narratives – shape natural resource management decisions.

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[10] A discourse is a "…shared meaning of a social phenomenon…" which is produced and reproduced through the repetition of certain practices (Adger et al. 2001, 681). Discourses arise through the association of specific narratives, signifying practices, concepts and ideologies; they are promulgated by institutions (Hajer 2005; Robbins, Hintz and Moore 2010).

Thus, environmental narratives merit scholarly attention as do the material conditions of an ecosystem.

Narratives are, in essence, stories. They can proceed in storybook form with a beginning, middle and end, or as arguments with premises and conclusions (Roe 1991). Narratives identify characters and describe a series of events arranged according to the story's internal logic (Coffey and Atkinson 1996). They also assign people certain roles as victims, perpetrators or bystanders of environmental degradation (Mearns and Leach 1996). Sometimes they fail to mention relevant actors. Through their description of cause-and-effect, they also implicitly set a range of possible solutions (Roe 1991; Hoben 1995). Narratives try to convince listeners of a certain course of action (Roe 1991). They describe not only what has happened in the past but also what will happen in the future according to the narrative's internal logic.

Environmental narratives are inherently simplifying because they rely on a set assumptions about complex natural systems and human-environment interaction (Menzies 2007). Because people have only incomplete knowledge about these systems, narratives help them make sense of environmental change. Roe (1991) even argues that narratives are necessary for policymakers to make decisions in uncertain and complex situations because they provide a concrete platform upon which to base a policy.

However, brushing over uncertainty and complexity obscures the reality of imperfect knowledge and can lead to policy solutions which do not address the roots of environmental problems (Fairhead and Leach 1995). For instance, the narrative of desertification blamed nomadic pastoralists and small farmers for increasing aridity in the Sahel and Sahara in Africa. As this story gained currency among development practitioners in the 1980s, scientists who

compiled United Nations (UN) reports on this crisis expressed reservations about its scientific basis. The narrative contradicted research on the biophysical causes of aridity, which indicates that human actions have little effect on rainfall levels (Forsyth 2003). The UN ignored these contradictions and uncertainties, perpetuated the narrative through declarations, and recommended that Sahel farmers and pastoralists change their land use patterns (Swift 1996). These inappropriate solutions, such as reducing the size of livestock herds, did nothing to increase green cover or reduce aridity (Sullivan 1996). The example of desertification shows why narratives are important: they provide the assumptions upon which decision-makers base their decisions about access, management and conservation of natural resources (Roe 1991).

Furthermore, narratives are part of a constant renegotiation of property rights including forest rights (Fortmann 1995). Narratives about property serve three purposes: to record claims and justifications, to remind people of their claims' legitimacy, and to influence the wider discourse. Groups without much political or economic power can use narratives to keep alive claims that are not officially recognized, often through references to historical or customary access. Indigenous and colonized people have long used narratives to argue for usufruct and communal land rights (Fortmann 1995). For instance, the forest-dwelling people of India have long used narratives about pre-colonial access to forest resources, through *nistar* agreements, to argue for continued access. The FRA of 2006 includes an avenue for communities to claim resources based on *nistar* rights (Government of India 2007).

The hegemonic narrative about an environmental change is the story that is most widely circulated. It is a means "… by which the values and cultural practices of the elite are disseminated in such a way that they become unquestioned" (Flint 2009, 327). The counternarrative offers alternative explanations for the environmental change and challenges

hegemony (Roe 1991; Fairhead and Leach 1995; Mearns and Leach 1996). But the hegemonic narrative dominates the debate, catching the attention of the policymakers. It is important to track the hegemonic narrative because it has the most influence on policy outcomes.

Environmental narratives feed into larger frameworks – discourses – about nature and society. A discourse is a "…shared meaning of a social phenomenon" which is produced and reproduced through the repetition of certain practices (Adger et al. 2001, 681). Discourses arise through the association of specific narratives, signifying practices, concepts and ideologies, and are promulgated by institutions (Hajer 2005; Robbins, Hintz and Moore 2010). These institutions disseminate their ideas throughout society, lending "truth value" to the narratives, practices, and ideologies by treating the discourse as true. For instant, African governments and international NGOs (institutions) adopt a desertification narrative, enact programs, make statements, and allot money (signifying practices) in accordance with the internal logic of the desertification narrative (Hoben 1995). Thus the narrative becomes part of the larger "development paradigm" or discourse. This discourse also is manifested in visual form when it is adopted in symbols and promoted by media campaigns (Hoben 1995).

During my two visits to India, I repeatedly saw the Bengal tiger: as a national symbol painted on schools beside the Indian flag, as a logo plastered on Earth Day posters, and in glossy photos in ecotourism brochures. The use of the tiger as a symbol of India and Indian environmentalism signals a larger tiger conservation discourse, of which the narratives I am studying are a part. The use of the tiger in tourism advertisements and by government authorities suggests a range of institutions using the same symbol and sharing in the discourse.

In many former colonial nations, the hegemonic narrative about forests is a reiteration of colonial narratives (Guha 1983; Leach and Fairhead 1995;Swift 1996). These narratives are part of a larger modernization discourse, in which "...ecological problems and crises… are the result of inadequate adoption and implementation of modern techniques of management, exploitation and conservation" (Robbins 2012, 18). These narratives begin with the native inhabitants using the forests in an inefficient or outright destructive manner. They might be doing so because of ignorance, because of lack of modern technology ("modern" meaning technology from the colonizing country), or because a population increase has recently made their once-sustainable practices untenable. In order to save the resource and save the native people from their own destructive tendencies, an outside institution must intervene (Menzies 2007).

In India, the British colonial government expropriated most communally-held forests. Using the logic of ecological modernization, they began to manage forests according to "scientific forestry" just developed in Germany. This "modern science" meant writing work plans, estimating sustained yield, and planting species like teak for export while cutting non-marketable trees (Guha 1983). In scientific forestry, cultivating commercially-valuable trees was "rational" management but cultivating diverse plants for local use was not (Guha 1983).

After independence, the story has repeated itself, with the Indian Forest Department administering forests according to pre-colonial laws, ultimately in the name of conservation instead of timber plantations. The tigers that the British feared and hunted nearly to extinction gradually became a valuable asset to a nation eager for conservation and wildlife tourism. India began turning its government-owned forests into protected areas, following the American model of human-free national parks. Many developing nations also adopted this model. Governments in developing nations have displaced thousands of forest-dwelling people from protected

conservation areas (Dowie 2009). These post-colonial governments have replaced the colonial

rulers as the heroes who save the forests and its wild denizens from the local people.

Cultural Essentialism and Ecological Legitimacy

Although stories about local people who degrade protected areas remain hegemonic, the

people living in these contested areas have created counternarratives (Leach and Fairhead 1995;

Zimmerer 2004). They use cultural essentialism to establish their "ecological legitimacy" as

ecological stewards (Pulido 1996). Cultural essentialism is the idea that culture, according to its

anthropological definition as unitary and fixed, determines people's individual and collective

identities (Grillo 2003). Essentialization means treating a particular trait as inherent to a culture,

and by extension, the individual and collective identities of a group. Outsiders and insiders can

both essentialize a group.

Colonial power used cultural essentialism to justify their dominance. The British rulers

of India declared that Indian Hindus belonged to an essentially weak and effeminate culture; they

needed protection and guidance of the British crown just as a woman needed the protection and

guidance of her husband (Mill1817; King 2002). Popular literature like James Mill's *History of*

British India devoted entire chapters to proving the effeminacy of Indian Hindu culture; colleges

for civil servants taught their Indian students that India's effeminate culture had led to its

colonization, and that the only way to regain dignity as a people was to adopt British culture

(Mill1817; King 2002). Cultural essentialism can harm the people essentialized.

But marginalized people can also use essentialism to fight existing hierarchies of power.

To claim ecological legitimacy, indigenous people argue that they act according to the norms of

their cultures, and that their cultures are inherently more sustainable than mainstream culture (Pulido 1996; Karlsson 2000). They essentialize themselves as ecological heroes rather than perpetrators of ecological destruction. For instance, for Hispanic grazers in New Mexico, the narrative of indigenous grazing patterns as inherently sustainable lent legitimacy to people whom the American state once viewed as incapable of managing natural resources. Their use of the narrative led to increased management rights and a land trust (Pulido 1996). Non-indigenous activists also essentialize indigenous people in the same way. This essentialism is part of a discourse that associates indigenous people with special knowledge of and reverence for their natural environment (Karlsson 2000; Cederlof and Sivaramakrishnan 2006).

Although it creates a political opportunity, essentialist claims of ecological legitimacy are problematic (Karlsson 2000). First, indigenous lifestyles are not necessarily sustainable (Damodaran 2006; Baviskar 2011). Some Indian communities who claim ecological legitimacy exploit the environment (Karlsson 2000). Furthermore, cultural essentialism effaces the differences within a group, ignoring gender, political ideology, class or any other factor that is not cultural. In the context of resource use, it ignores differences in resource consumption and access *within* an indigenous community. The assumption that each village of indigenous people is a homogenous, egalitarian unit has led to conflicts in community-based conservation programs worldwide (Menzies 2007).

Furthermore, cultural essentialism hides differences between one group of indigenous people and another. For instance, in Sarawak, Malaysia, the narrative of forest people with reverence for the forest deprived the indigenous Penan of their individuality (Brosius 1997). Although well-intentioned, Western environmentalists' attempts to valorize the Penan's specific environmental knowledge by constructing it as "mystical wisdom" did this group a disservice.

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Brosius (1997) describes how two environmentalists took Brosius's field research on sago palm and naming systems and expanded it to imply a widespread conservation ethic reminiscent of Western romanticism, and with "…little relation to any set of ideas that would be recognizable to Penan" (Brosius 1997, 97). A narrative like this threatens to further marginalize indigenous communities by replacing their complex practices and identities with two-dimensional images of a "noble savage" (Karlsson 2000). These images allow policymakers to ignore the real, material problems that indigenous people face. Treating all indigenous people as "noble savages" leads to inappropriate environmental policies based on an idealized stereotype of how an indigenous person should act in relation to her environment.

In India, indigenous people and leftist activists claim that indigenous people live in harmony with nature, and they promote this claim through counternarratives (Karlsson 2005; Cederlof and Sivaramakrishnan 2006; Baviskar 2011). The discourse of indigeneity "…asserts that, for adivasis, land, forests and wild animals are not merely resources for subsistence, but aspects of a living nature that is sacred and hence to be treated with respect. Relations with the natural and social world are rooted in a communitarian ethic which is egalitarian and redistributive" (Baviskar 2011). The local users become the heroes of the degradation story, who judiciously used natural resources before the villainous government dispossessed them and imposed external management, leading to degradation. These counternarratives undermine hegemony because they call for a redistribution of power over protected areas. By establishing that indigenous people are, culturally, the best possible land managers, these narratives allows them to claim rights in protected areas that were closed to them by the logic of ecological modernization.

Indigenous Indians have successfully used essentialism in counternarratives about resource control. In the 1930s, indigenous activists in Central India began to struggle against the government of Bihar state under the banner of *adivasi* identity (Damodaran 2006). Their use of the term, combined with their claim to the region's forests (controlled by the government of Bihar), successfully positioned *adivasi* forest use as more sustainable than the government's. This *adivasi* movement culminated decades later in 2000 with the formation of the new state Jharkhand (Damodaran 2006). In 2006 indigenous groups and allied activists used a similar narrative – that indigenous forest use is inherently sustainable – to pressure the central government to adopt the FRA. The preface of the Act itself tells a story of ecological legitimacy: "the forest rights on ancestral lands …were not adequately recognized in the consolidation of State forests during the colonial period as well as in independent India resulting in historical injustice to *the forest dwelling Scheduled Tribes and other traditional forest dwellers who are integral to the very survival and sustainability of the forest ecosystems*" (Government of India 2007, section A, emphasis added).

Community Forestry and Community Conservation

In response to the failures of human-free conservation areas, and evidence that people are more likely to respect resource laws if they have a role in their formulation, development practitioners and environmentalists have championed "community conservation" – local people participating in management of ecosystems (Agarwal and Gibson 1999). Following Adams and Hulme (2001), community conservation means "… strategies that emphasize the role of local residents in decision-making about natural resources" and conservation (p. 13). Community conservation includes a wide breadth of practices, from the integrated conservation and

development programs in Africa to the community resource management projects in specific

protected areas (Newmark and Hough 2000). Community-based management of forests, also

known as "community forestry," has become popular in developing countries which are home to

most of the world's forests (Pagdee, Kim and Daugherty 2006). In the 1970s, Nepal became the

first nation to institute a nationwide community forestry program (Springate-Baginski et al.

2007).

Across the world, community forestry programs range widely in their legal foundation

and the depth of community involvement. In India, the FRA was preceded by Joint Forest

Management (JFM). Promulgated by the non-binding Forest Policy of 1988, JFM is a voluntary

power-sharing arrangement in which the Forest Department makes management decisions after

consultation with Forest Committees (Upadhyay 2003). JFM, unlike the FRA, is not a statutory

reform – it did not recognize the land or use *rights* of local people. Statutory forest tenure

reforms give people legal rights to own, use and/or manage forest resources.

Statutory forest tenure reform is becoming more common worldwide (Larson, Barry and

Dahal 2010). These laws are promoted by disparate groups, often using different narratives as

rationales. Many indigenous peoples' organizations see tenure reform as reparation for past

government expropriation (Karlsson 2000, Campaign for Survival and Dignity 2010). They

frame their claims for communal and individual rights around their ecological legitimacy and

indigeneity. Bilateral and international organizations such as the United States Agency for

International Development (USAID) and the World Bank promote forest tenure reform in order

to increase individual ownership of forest resources (World Bank 2006; USAID 2011).

According their narrative, private ownership gives the forest owner an incentive to use the forest

sustainably and invest in the land. This is part of ecological modernization discourse because it

blames a lack of market access and clearly-defined property rights for environmental degradation. Actors who promote this narrative recommend statutory tenure reform alongside programs that "modernize" forestry and increase forest people's access to markets (World Bank 2006). These narratives are not rigid, and actors may adopt features of both.

Since the 1980s, countries have turned to community forestry, passing numerous laws, amendments, and regulations in the hopes of better conservation outcomes (Barry, Larson and Dahal 2010). From 1985 to 2002, governments in the 30 most forested countries have passed laws legally transferring over 200 million hectares of forest land to communities and indigenous people (White and Martin 2002, 3). From 2002 to 2008 alone, 10 of the 30 most forested countries have seen an increase in the amount of forestland designated for the use of communities or indigenous people, and 7 countries experienced an increase in forestland directly owned by indigenous people or communities (Sunderlin, Hatcher and Liddle 2008, 9). A flurry of new laws in Asia, Africa and Latin America give local communities usufruct and/or ownership rights, with varying levels of control over the forest (Larson, Barry and Dahal 2010; Almeida and Hatcher legislation table 2011). However, rights on paper do not necessarily translate into actual, enforceable access for indigenous people. Governments implement laws very slowly or ignore them, and certain laws have reduced access for people with existing, socially-accepted customary claims. India's FRA, which entered into force in 2008, allows millions of local users to get land and resources rights in government-owned forest. But as of 2012, the Indian government has recognized very few rights and continues to enjoy a monopoly over forest management.

Conclusion

Many environmental decisions, with their inherent complexity, depend on what narratives policymakers believe. The issue of indigenous people's rights in Indian tiger reserves is incredibly complex, involving the livelihoods of millions, a burgeoning tourism industry, and a well-publicized tiger conservation project in which the government invested billions of rupees. In this complex situation, the actions of officials from the Minister of Environment and Forests to the lowly Forest Department functionary depend not on what they know about tigers and people, but on what they *think* they know. Narratives about tigers and indigenous people shape the implementation of laws in tiger reserves. This literature review has explained the significance of narratives and discourses and demonstrated how the narrative itself is a political battleground.

Methodology

I chose 50 articles, reports, and press releases from 20 Indian newspapers, magazines and NGO publications as my samples. Drawing on theories of narrative analysis, I coded these samples for narrative elements – explanation of problem, problem, solution, and characters – and how indigenous people are described: adjectives, quotations, grammatical structure, names, and prescriptives. I identified three general narratives united by common narrative codes and similar descriptions of indigenous people. Finally, I re-contextualized the narratives to reflect on who they empower and how they influence on-the-ground realities in tiger reserves.

My first research question was: What different narratives do publications publish about indigenous people and tiger conservation? My sub-questions are: How do actors invoke "rights" or the Forest Rights Act (FRA) in these narratives? How do actors explain the decline of the tiger? My second research question is about whether these narratives essentialize indigenous peoples. In order to evaluate examples of essentialization, I answered this sub-question: how do narratives describe indigenous people?

Initial Methodological Decisions

I chose to focus on tigers because tiger reserves are the sites of the most intense conflicts over indigenous people's rights. Forest Department officials often refuse to recognize rights in tiger reserves or attempt to strip those rights after mapping core zones. The Ministry of Environment and Forests (MoEF), through its creation of a separate legal category and separate guidelines for tiger reserves, treats these reserves differently from other protected areas even though the FRA applies to all protected areas. Disregarding the FRA and Wild Life (Protection)

Act, MoEF and the Forest Department treat tigers as a uniquely endangered species whose protection precludes the rights guaranteed to people in protected areas. Local government official have stalled or obstructed the FRA claims process in most protected areas, and the obstruction is particularly severe in tiger reserves.

I focused on indigenous people because of my interest in how outside actors represent local people and how local people represent themselves in their claims to protected forests. Forest-dwelling people worldwide are increasingly asserting their indigeneity and linking it to sustainable practices to strengthen their claims to government-controlled resources (Karlsson 2000; Damodaran 2006). Thus, wherever possible I limited my samples to narratives about that self-identify or are identified as "indigenous," "tribal," or "*adivasi*."

I chose to study English-language samples because I cannot read any Indian language fluently. Furthermore, English is the language of the governing elite of India. It is one of two official administrative languages of the central government, so national politicians speak English and read English-language media. Most Indian universities teach in English, and many NGOs operate in English. My research explores the narratives read and shaped by actors involved in the implementation of forest law: government officials, NGOs and activists, and indigenous people themselves.

I developed my understanding of the role of English narratives through my work with the Vivekananda Girijana Kalyana Kendra. The issue of people in tiger reserves has drawn numerous sectors of society into the debate. While writing a history of resource rights in Biligiri Ranganathaswamy Temple Tiger Reserve, I spoke to a host of actors: the indigenous Soligas,

local political interest groups, conservation organizations, and Forest Department officials. I

also read many popular press articles and NGO publications to under the political context

For this study, I selected samples from the following sources.

Category	Sources	Main place of publication
Newspapers	*The Times of India*	Mumbai, Maharashtra; New Delhi
	Hindustan Times	New Delhi
	The Hindu	Chennai, Tamil Nadu
	The Telegraph	Kolkata, West Bengal
	Deccan Chronicle	Hyderabad, Andhra Pradesh[11]
Magazines	*Outlook*	New Delhi
	The Week	Kochi, Kerala
	India Today	New Delhi
	Tehelka	New Delhi
	Economic & Political Weekly	Mumbai, Maharashtra
	Down to Earth	New Delhi
	Sources	**Primary Area of Operation**
Environment and development and indigenous people's NGOs	Kalpavriksh+	Maharashtra
	Ashoka Trust for Research in Ecology and the Environment (ATREE)+	Western Ghats (Karnataka, Tamil Nadu, Maharashtra, Kerala) and Northeast states
	Vasundhara+	Orissa
	Campaign for Survival and Dignity (CSD)	Nationwide
	National Forum of Forest Peoples and Forest Workers (NFFPFW)	Nationwide
Conservation NGOs	Wildlife Protection Society of India	Nationwide
	Wildlife Trust of India*	Nationwide
	WWF-India+*	Nationwide (branch of international)
	Wildlife Conservation Society-India+*	Karnataka (branch of international)

Table 1: Sources of samples

+ Member of the Future of Conservation Network
* Member of the Global Tiger Initiative
Selecting Sources: Popular Press

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[11] I initially confused *Deccan Chronicle* with *Deccan Herald*, another English daily published in South India, and analyzed three articles from it. *Deccan Herald* has detailed coverage of indigenous people in protected areas. I did not include these findings in my main analysis.

I developed a list of English popular press that includes widely-circulating newspapers and provides wide geographical coverage. There is no database that would allow me to search multiple Indian English newspapers and magazines, so I created my list with the help of Mount Holyoke College's research librarians and my contacts in Indian NGOs.

In order to explore the narratives disseminated among the English-speaking public, I chose the five highest-circulating English newspapers in the country.[12] Newspaper coverage of tiger reserves and indigenous politics is largely regional, so I tried to cover all the regions where the FRA was in effect. Fortunately, the five top newspapers offer considerable geographic diversity: they originate from North India (*The Times of India, Hindustan Times*), West India (*The Times of India*), East India (*The Telegraph*), and South India (*The Hindu, Deccan Chronicle*).

I also wanted to select magazines based on circulation[13] but found that the highest-circulating ones were devoted to themes like sports or business and did not mention indigenous people or tiger reserves. I picked the top news magazines: *Outlook, The Week,* and *India Today*.[14] I added *Tehelka, Economic & Political Weekly,* and *Down to Earth* because these publications frequently publish articles about conservation and indigenous people. *Tehelka* specializes in investigative journalism. *Economic & Political Weekly* is a social sciences magazine which publishes pieces about indigenous rights and conservation, penned by activist-academics. The magazine itself is not peer reviewed but its contributors often publish research

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[12] According to the 2010 Indian Readership Survey. Media Research Users Council. Top 10 English dailies: Indian readership survey (IRS) 2010 — quarter 1. in Newswatch.in [database online]. 2010 [cited September 10 2011]. Available from http://archives.newswatch.in/newsblog/7983.

[13] According to the 2010 Indian Readership Survey. Media Research Users Council. Top 10 English magazines: Indian readership survey (IRS) 2010 — quarter 1. in Newswatch.in [database online]. 2010 [cited September 30 2011]. Available from http://archives.newswatch.in/newsblog/7985.

[14] *India Today* had no coverage of my study topic within my set time range, so I had no samples from it.

on those same topics in peer-reviewed journals. Professor Uditi Sen, a specialist in Indian history at Hampshire College, recommended that I include this magazine in my study. *Down to Earth* is a biweekly environmental science and politics magazine. The magazines I selected (Table 1) largely originate in the same city, but this is of less significance since their content is themed rather than regional.

Selecting Sources: Non-Governmental Organization Publications

I separated the NGOs engaged in the tiger reserve debate into two categories: those focused on environment and development, and indigenous people, and those focused on conservation alone. In the first category are Kalpavriksh, the Ashoka Trust for Research in the Environment and Ecology (ATREE), Vasundhara, the Campaign for Survival and Dignity (CSD), and the National Forum of Forest People and Forest Workers (NFFPFW). I chose them because of their work with people living in tiger reserves and because their publications are available online.

Kalpavriksh, ATREE, and Vasundhara are not led by indigenous people, but CSD and NFFPFW are. CSD is a national coalition of various indigenous forest peoples' organization. I would have preferred to sample those organizations' narratives but they do not have English websites. All five NGOs have helped organize campaigns for the implementation of the FRA and against relocation from tiger reserves. ATREE, Kalpavriksh, and Vasundhara also publish scientific studies about NTFP use, community-based conservation, and other issues relevant to indigenous livelihoods. All five NGOs have contact with each other at workshops and other events. Kalpavriksh, ATREE, and Vasundhara belong to a network called the Future of Conservation in India. Thus, there is a potential for auto-correlation within this category in my data.

The second category is NGOs focused on conservation, particularly tiger conservation. They work on a wider geographical scale than NGOs in the first category; some are Indian branches of international organizations. WWF has been involved in Indian tiger conservation since the 1970s. The Wildlife Protection Society of India enjoys close relationships with the Forest Department and tiger reserves officials, for whom it runs anti-poaching trainings. The Wildlife Protection Society of India and the Wildlife Trust of India opposed the Forest Rights Act and filed a Supreme Court case against it, claiming that legitimizing human habitation in protected areas would harm wildlife.[15] Wildlife Conservation Society-India and WWF-India are also members of the Future of Conservation in India network.[16] WWF, Wildlife Conservation Society-India, and the Wildlife Trust of India are members of the Global Tiger Initiative.

Selecting Samples

I combed through online newspapers, magazines, and NGO websites to find samples. I used keywords searches to find samples that addressed about tiger conservation and indigenous people. I set a lower date limit of 2008 for samples from NGO publications and magazines, since the FRA only came into force in 2008. The exception is a 2007 report from Vasundhara. I included it because the authors analyzed the political situation in Sunabeda Tiger Reserve though the FRA were in force. Since newspapers publish thousands of articles, I set the lower date limit for newspapers at 2010 to narrow my choices. This decision produced a body of samples from 2007 to 2012, with the newspaper samples more recent than the others. Consequently, I do not

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[15] The court dismissed their case.

[16] It is unclear if membership in the network constitutes an endorsement of all Future of Conservation documents. I only consider Future of Conservation documents to be samples from the NGOs specifically mentioned on that document.

analyze how narratives relate to each other chronologically, as my date parameters are skewed toward recent samples.

I looked for samples which mentioned tigers *and* indigenous people. First, I searched each website to see which term for indigenous people was more common: "tribal," "*adivasi*," or "indigenous." I then used that term for my keyword searches. I then searched using keywords: "tiger reserve" AND tribal, tiger AND tribal, tiger AND "forest rights." "Tribal AND tiger" was the most common combination. It was difficult to find relevant pieces from the conservation NGOs, as some had few publications. I looked for "village AND tiger" when "tribal AND tiger" yielded no results.   I tried to search entire NGO websites using keywords but found samples faster by browsing the "Publications," "Articles," or "Press Releases" section where the NGO compiled its publications. When searching environment and development NGO websites, I found it efficient to use more technical terminology: Critical Tiger Habitat, Forest Rights Act, forest rights, etc.

The methodological decision to select samples that addressed *both* tigers and local indigenous people reflects my research question: What narratives do publications publish about indigenous people and tiger conservation? But only including articles that mentioned both affects another research question: How do actors explain tiger decline? Requiring both keywords eliminated from my study an unknown number of samples that might explain tiger decline without any reference to indigenous people.

I selected two to three pieces from each source. If I found more than three samples fitting the criteria from the same source, I selected the three samples that were longest and most recent. I used an average of three samples per source for newspapers and both categories of NGOs, and two articles per source for magazines. I favored longer articles because they offered more

material for a narrative analysis, and I chose the most recent because of the shifting legislative footing of tiger reserve governance. My selection criteria might have led to an overrepresentation of articles about Biligiri Ranganathaswamy Temple Tiger Reserve. The Soligas' campaign against the declaration has received considerable press attention, and the reserve has long been a site of NGO activity.

NGO employees frequently write articles for the same magazines and newspapers from which I sampled. Representatives of ATREE, Kalpavriksh, CSD, NFFWFP, and the Wildlife Conservation Society of India published pieces in *Down to Earth*, *Economic & Political Weekly*, and *Deccan Herald*. I consider these articles, although printed in the popular press, to be part of each organization's official narrative; they are listed on their websites as organizational publications. I did not treat them as samples of the newspaper or magazine they appeared in.[17]

The first category of NGOs (environment and development NGOs and indigenous peoples' NGOs) published several documents jointly. I had to include these joint documents in order have enough samples for each organization. Including them increased the number of samples for two environmental and development NGOs; I had five samples for Kalpavriksh and four for ATREE.[18] Furthermore, they present the risk of auto-correlation, since a sample written by three NGOs means all three NGOs share that narrative in that sample. I kept this in mind when writing my results; the NGOs in the first category explicitly share certain narratives.

Coding

Coding the samples was an iterative process. Coffey and Atkinson (1996) describe one type of coding as the reduction of data into categories, to create an index of "broad analytic

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[17] For newspapers and magazines, I only included samples written by staff journalists. The one exception is *Economic & Political Weekly*. Its staff writers do not write its feature articles; it is a journal.
[18] For a complete list of samples, please see Appendix A.

categories" that share a common code and can be easily retrieved (28). The goal of this "code-and-retrieve" method is to collect examples of a repeated phenomenon and then to analyze them for "…patterns, differences, commonalities, and structures" (Coffey and Atkinson 1996, 29). I initially tried to code by summarizing each paragraph in each sample and assigning a topic to it. I realized that I was producing a list of topics which did not address my research questions.

Then I developed a set of codes for the various features of a narrative. I considered the elements that a narrative, as a story, should have: characters (villains, victims, and heroes), problem(s), explanation of problem(s), and a solution. My methodology originates with Roe, who lays out a procedure for identifying a narrative according to its beginning, middle, and end in his 1994 book *Narrative Policy Analysis*. However, his process applies to interviews, so I modified his procedures to fit my textual samples.

In my own methodology, I identified the problem(s), explanation of the problem, and the solution. This is equivalent to the beginning of a story (explanation of the problem), the middle (the problem occurs), and the solution (end). The explanation of problem, analogous to the steps leading up to a climax in a conventional story, is important because it establishes the internal logic of the narrative (Roe 1994). Finally, I included characters in my analysis, based on Coffey and Atkinson (1996). The solution that a narrative offers to the problem depends both how it explains the problem's existence and who it attributes that problem to. I divided characters into three categories: villains, victims, and heroes.[19] Finally, I added two narrative codes, simple code-and-retrieve devices to track mentions of legal rights and explanations of tiger decline. These codes allowed me to identify narratives linking indigenous people and tiger conservation and to identify "axes" along which they might differ (in their characterization, problem, explanation of problem, and solution).

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[19] The final list of codes is available in Appendix B.

In my second stage of coding, I focused only on identifying characters and summarizing. I read through each article twice, listed characters, summarized, and circled any of the following: striking terms, particularly any definitions of "tribal;" scientific studies; repeated ideas; passive voice; and references to tigers as part of a global biological heritage. At the end of each article, I compiled a list of characters, defining each as a victim, villain or hero. Furthermore, I noted if the indigenous people were generally the subjects or objects of verbs in sentences. I coded only 20 articles this way.

The result of this coding regimen was an unwieldy list of codes. I was beginning to see certain codes appear in pairs but it was difficult to decide what was significant. I had forgotten that my coding method should fit my research questions. Then I used NVivo 9 software to create an extensive hierarchy of over 45 codes. I wasted hours trying to do this meticulous coding; I began to focus on words instead of concepts. What my research questions required was a macro-level approach, addressing characters, problems, and solutions. I abandoned the NVivo software after coding just three samples.

Returning to Coffey and Atkinson (1996) I realized that my first attempts at coding had been reductionist. I developed my final scheme. "…[C]oding can be used to expand, transform, and reconceptualize data", rather than just to reduce it to certain words (Coffey and Atkinson 1996, 29). The exercise of creating a hierarchy of parent and child codes in NVivo proved useful; the codes I had set up as parent codes were the ones truly relevant to my research questions. I eliminated the others. Returning to my research chart, I realized that I had to do two different types of coding: for the narrative features (characters, problem, explanation of problem, and characters) and for the descriptions of indigenous people. The final list of codes is available in Appendix B.

In order to answer my question about essentialization of indigenous people, I coded for a series of elements. I looked for the name used for indigenous people, adjectives applied to them, whether they are subject or object of verbs, whether the author quotes them, and any outright prescriptives about them. I also coded for definitions of indigenous people in relation to non-indigenous people. Finally, after compiling the narrative codes, I re-contextualized the information in the article; I looked to see what role the articles cast the indigenous people in. Because essentialization means applying a single trait to a whole group, I used adjectives as my main criterion for identifying essentialization.

Analyzing narratives

I looked for patterns and anomalies in my codes. Based on shared narrative codes, I identified three general narratives about conservation and indigenous people: tigers versus tribals, ecodevelopment, and forest people versus the government. I also found that narratives which shared narrative codes often shared codes about descriptions of indigenous people. I will delve into the content of these three narratives in the next chapter. Finally, I labeled certain narratives "hegemonic" and others "counternarratives" by examining them in the historical, social, and political context of Indian tiger reserves. If a narrative represents the values and practices of the ruling elite – in the case of tiger reserves, Forest Department and MoEF officials – as universal, then it is hegemonic (Flint 2009). If it undermines hegemony, it is a counternarrative.

Conclusion

Formulating the methodology was the hardest part of the thesis. I felt overwhelmed and hoped to find a step-by-step narrative analysis method, one relevant to my topic, in the existing literature. However, developing the methodology myself led to important intellectual growth. Gradually I realized that "science" of research is not limited to a laboratory. It consists of the thoughtful design of a social science study: picking research questions, tailoring a methodology to those questions, and tailoring the analysis to the content of the narratives I found. Although I came to this study with preconceived notions of what narratives existed, I did my best to analyze what I found, rather than what I expected to find.

Results

        Actors use three main narratives to discuss indigenous people and tiger conservation: tigers versus tribals, ecodevelopment, and forest people versus the government. The hegemonic narrative, tiger versus tribals, blames indigenous people for tiger decline and suggests relocating them from tiger reserves. Most conservation NGOs use an ecodevelopment narrative, in which NGOs teach forest-dwelling people how to change their behavior to accommodate tigers. Finally, the environment and development and indigenous people's NGOs tell a story of forest people versus the government. The government has harmed indigenous people and tigers; it ought to step aside so indigenous people can manage local ecosystems as they have for millennia.

        In the tigers versus tribals narrative, indigenous people, here called "tribals," alter tiger habitats in a desperate attempt to survive in the forest. They farm, graze livestock, collect NTFPs, and even poach tigers. The government must relocate them from the reserves, so they join mainstream Indian society and find jobs that do not harm the environment. This narrative emerged during the 2005 parliamentary debate on the Forest Rights Act, when conservation NGOs claimed that recognizing rights in protected areas would decimate wildlife, but it also draws on the colonial British concept of the essentially ignorant "tribal." This narrative is hegemonic; it appears in the widest-circulating samples. It represents the Forest Department's concept of human-free tiger reserves – a concept which ensures the Department's monopoly over forest management – as the *only* solution to tiger decline. In the tiger versus tribals tribals narrative, creating human-free reserves is the unquestioned, given method for conserving tigers. In fact, many samples which use this narrative treat tiger conservation as *synonymous* with the relocation of people from tiger reserves.

The ecodevelopment narrative has the same central problem – indigenous people harm tigers – but suggests a different solution. People can coexist with tigers on the margins of a tiger reserve, provided they make some changes. "Ecodevelopment" is a suite of programs that changes people's behavior so that they remove less biomass from the forest. The story frames forest-dwelling people as victims of circumstance who deplete forests because of poverty. The people are passive; they can manage their own ecodevelopment only after an NGO educates them.

The forest people versus government counternarrative reverses the terms of the tigers versus tribals narrative. All samples from environment and development and indigenous people's NGOs use this narrative, as do a few samples from the popular press. In the beginning of this story, indigenous people have lived peacefully with tigers for years. The government stole their lands and resources for industrial projects and human-free protected areas. MoEF and the Forest Department refuse to recognize people's rights in tiger reserves and evict them from the reserves. The solution to this problem is for the government to recognize indigenous and other forest-dwelling people's rights under the FRA, including the right to conserve ecosystems. This story characterizes forest-dwelling people as the only ecologically legitimate residents of tiger reserves. As a counternarrative, it undermines the government's claim to ecological legitimacy and offers an alternate explanation for tiger decline: government-approved industrial development.

Tigers versus Tribals

The hegemonic tigers versus tribals narrative, which claims that tigers and tribal people are in conflict, dominates widely-circulating media. The story rejects the possibility of

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coexistence between tigers and people even though the laws governing tiger reserves – the FRA and the WLPA – allow coexistence. These stories, through their characterization and use of the word "tribal," extend the British colonial concept of indigenous people as primitive destroyers of the environment. The wide circulation of this narrative suggests that colonial ideas about conservation and indigenous people retain currency among English-speaking Indians, in spite of decades of indigenous activism and recent legislative reform.

The tigers versus tribals story positions tigers' and tribals' interests in opposition to each other. Several newspapers and magazines articles assume that the WLPA *requires* the government to remove everyone from a tiger reserve's core zone. *The Times of India* article "Mahabaleshwar Farmers Oppose Tiger Reserve" describes villagers' fears that the new Sahyadri Tiger Reserve will lead to tiger attacks, loss of farmland, and restrictions on building (TNN Oct 2011). The article states that these restrictions are inherent in tiger conservation: "The core area will not have human habitation, while in the buffer areas animals and humans can coexist…Many villagers have already been shifted and the remaining will be relocated soon." The relocation is a *fait accompli*. There is similar newspaper coverage of Palamau Tiger Reserve in Jharkhand, Biligiri Ranganathaswamy Temple (BRT) Tiger Reserve in Karnataka and Nagarjunasagar-Srisailam Tiger Reserve in Andhra Pradesh (Mukesh May 2011; Khajane Jan 2011; Tata June 2010). These three samples present indigenous people as victims who must make room for tigers: "The area will be free of human habitation in view of protecting the endangered cat" states an article about BRT Tiger Reserve (Khajane Jan 2011). Even when sympathetic to the hardships of relocated tribals, the tigers versus tribals story rejects the idea of coexistence.

Since tigers cannot coexist with people, the only solution is relocation. When conservation NGOs employ the tigers versus tribals narrative, they advocate relocation using appeals to science. WWF-India declares that villagers should move out of Achanakmar Tiger Reserve in Maharashtra "…so that competition between humans and wildlife for the forest resources is reduced, positively impacting the habitat leading to regeneration of grasslands and water bodies free of disturbance, which in turn will help the tiger population to grow" (WWF-India July 2011). This claim uses terms from biology and ecology –"regeneration," "competition," "disturbance" – and reduces the complexity of human-environment interaction into a chain of causes and effects in which human presence is necessarily bad for tigers. The Wildlife Conservation Society of India (WCS-I) also declares relocation a scientific imperative. In a WCS-I working paper about relocation for conservation, K. Ullas Karanth and Krithi Karanth state, "conservationists in South Asia do not often have recourse to 'human-wildlife coexistence'... that helps reduce pressure in some conservation contexts…Rather, conservationists are being compelled to consider the relocation of human settlements to arrest fragmentation" (Karanth and Karanth 2007, 48). In an editorial in *Down to Earth* magazine, WCS-I's Sanjay Gubbi writes, "relocation will definitely help improve wildlife numbers" (August 2010). Conservation activists Praveen Bhargav and Shehkar Dattatri make a similar recommendation in *Economic & Political Weekly*: "It is therefore imperative that we insulate at least the 3-4% of India comprising [protected areas] from all incompatible and extractive uses …" (May 2011, 9). Harkening back to the legislative debate on the FRA, Bhargav and Dattatri say that FRA should not be implemented in any protected areas because it would be disastrous for wildlife. Tigers versus tribals narratives also tout the benefits of relocation to the people who relocate (Karanth and Karanth 2007; Gubbi August 2010; *The Week* "Cracker" Oct 2011; *The*

Week "Slack" Oct 2011). The advocacy of relocation is evident in word choice. These samples

consistently use terms with positive connotations: "resettlement," "joining the mainstream," and

"rehabilitation" instead of "displacement" or "eviction."

The tigers versus tribals narrative describes indigenous people as hapless destroyers of

the environment. Journalists and NGO employees who employ this narrative invariably call

indigenous people "tribals," a term with colonial connotations of primitiveness and savagery.

The samples from indigenous people themselves never use the word "tribal," preferring "*adivasi*"

or the more inclusive "forest people" (CSD 2008; Sanawar, Ghosh and Datta Jan 2008;

NFFPFW June 2009). Furthermore, samples about wildlife poaching explicitly describe tribal

people as enemies of tigers. A *Deccan Chronicle* article describes how Karnataka police

discovered a network of North Indian tribes working with local tribes to track and kill wildlife.

The title declares that "tribesmen are the biggest threat" to tigers (*Deccan Chronicle* Jan 2012).

These hunting stories essentialize indigenous people, defining their entire culture in the

word "hunter." A journalist writing about the entry of indigenous people into Nallamala

(Nagarjunasagar-Srisailam) Tiger Reserve calls them "…a tribe of Rajasthan (Katni) and another

tribe (Bahili-ya) of Madhya Pradesh and Jharkhand … famous for tiger hunting" (*Deccan

Chronicle* Feb 2012). An article in *The Telegraph* explicitly blames the cultural values of

indigenous people for wildlife deaths in Simlipal Tiger Reserve in Orissa. The indigenous people

there practice *akhand shikar*, a ritual hunt "…when tribal people armed with guns, bows and

arrows plunge into the protected forests of the sanctuary slaying animals virtually at will"

(Mishra Nov 2011). The author calls them "blood thirsty" and blames them for the deaths of

elephants in the reserve. Even though they probably did not kill the elephants themselves, their

"gory" ritual could have provided cover for ivory poachers (Mishra Nov 2011).

In this story, indigenous people have little opportunity to define themselves. Only two of the fifteen samples in this category actually quote the forest-dwelling people who are in conflict with tigers. Instead, the samples quote NGO and Forest Department employees. Some of these experts claim to know what is best for indigenous people. Bhargav and Dattatri declare: "What forest dwellers require is not a marginal improvement of their status quo [FRA rights recognition] but a set of proactive solutions that will provide real emancipation, such as fair resettlement outside PAs [protected areas], education, and new livelihood options that can get them out of their dependence on forests" (May 2011, 9).

The hegemonic tigers and tribals narrative insists that human-tiger coexistence is impossible, environmentally unsustainable, and even illegal. By blaming tiger decline on indigenous people, particularly hunters, this narrative presents the Forest Department's preferred solution – eviction – as the only solution to tiger decline. "Rights" never appear in these samples, nor does any description of indigenous people helping the environment, because that would undermine the central argument for relocation. The tigers versus tribals narrative helps to justify and normalize the Forest Department's ongoing evictions and its refusal to grant forest rights in reserves.

Ecodevelopment

In this narrative, forest dwelling people's use of forest resources threatens tiger survival by degrading the forest. NGOs can solve this problem by weaning people off of their "dependence" on forests through ecodevelopment. Ecodevelopment is based on the assumption that people who are more developed (healthier, better educated, and wealthier) will take jobs outside the forest and thus "…reduce pressure on … forest resources" (WPSI "Support" 2012).

Conservation NGOs and two newspapers use this narrative. NGOs cast their own organizations as the heroes with local people as their secondary partners. This narrative describes indigenous people as useful to the larger mission of conservation but only with NGO or government help.

In this story, indigenous people use forest resources at unsustainable levels because of poverty. NGOs must intervene to reduce their dependence on forest resources and make them allies in conservation. The solution may be specific to conservation, such as an educational campaign to change attitudes toward tigers, or it could be any development program. For example, the Wildlife Protection Society of India (WPSI) screens environmental documentaries and holds nature club meetings in the villages in Sundarban Tiger Reserve in West Bengal, to convince local people to "…view wildlife and their environment as an asset rather than a threat" (WPSI "Support" 2012). WPSI also runs a kindergarten, health camps, microcredit self-help groups, and vocational training for general ecodevelopment. The Wildlife Trust of India (WTI) describes its similar initiatives in Valmiki Tiger Reserve in Bihar and near the proposed Nazgira-Navegaon Tiger Reserve in Maharashtra (WTI July 2008; WTI August 2008). The ecodevelopment narrative never mentions that these people might have rights to use forest resources. Although the suggested solutions, such as switching from a wood to biogas stove, are less disruptive than relocation, the ecodevelopment narrative is similar to the tigers versus tribals narrative because it suggests that local people must accommodate tigers. It is indigenous people who are "altering lifestyles for tiger conservation" (WTI July 2008).

This narrative uses cultural essentialism to establish indigenous people's connection to nature. Praising the positive contributions they can make to saving tigers, half of the samples in this category use the term "indigenous" instead of "tribal." For instance, Wildlife Trust of India describes the "indigenous" Toda people in Tamil Nadu as having "traditional, nature-linked

values" (WTI Aug 2010). They build temples for their sacred buffaloes and they "…revere the tiger as supreme divinity…" (WTI August 2008). WWF-India extols the qualities of the indigenous Pardi children enrolled in a WWF educational program in Central India. The children attend a school-preparation program to encourage them to continue their education and discourage them from becoming poachers like their parents (WWF-India April 2010). Pardi children have a "…treasure trove of information... a wealth of knowledge on nature" (WWF-India April 2010). According to WWF-India employee Sangita Saxena, "They have an inborn quality to learn fast apart from hunting skill; their in-depth knowledge about wild flora and fauna can develop them into excellent nature guides..." (WWF-India April 2010). She offers examples of these talents to dispel the stereotype that all Pardis are hunters but actually replaces one idea of essential Pardi culture – the hunter – with another – the nature expert.

However wonderful their essential qualities, in the ecodevelopment story, indigenous people cannot use these qualities alone. They must be educated and led by the government or NGOs. This view of indigenous people as passive and ripe for manipulation is evident in how indigenous people are almost always the object of actions. For instance, in an article about ecotourism, the Minster of the Environment and Forests Jairam Ramesh declares that forest dwellers "…will be made partners in sustainable forest management" (The Hindu April 2011, emphasis added). They do not *become* partners; they *are made* partners. The WWF-India staff who administer the Pardi education program frame the children's talents in similar ways: "Their skills can also *be utilised* in law & order services, sports and in the entertainment world …" (WWF-India April 2010, emphasis added). The Andhra Pradesh Forest Department has its own plans to use the "…extremely primitive…" Chenchu people in Nallamala (Nagarjunasagar-Srisailam) Tiger Reserve (Tata June 2010). Although the Department is evicting them from the

core zone, it will also "…use Chenchus..." for conservation projects in the reserve. The Chenchus are the object of action, rather than the subject. Numerous NGO officials and Forest Department officials praise the Chenchus' knowledge of tigers and opine that they "…can be trained" as tourist guides and "…be recruited…" for a tiger protection force (Tata June 2010). Chenchus have the potential to be the heroes who save the tigers but not without becoming part of the state conservation apparatus. The ecodevelopment story offers indigenous people some agency but only as junior partners in ecodevelopment led by the government or NGOs.

This story's description of indigenous people as essentially connected to nature is more positive than the characterization in the tigers versus tribals narrative but still patronizing. For instance, the man who oversees the WWF Pardi education program declares, "… once [the Pardi children] are guided in the right direction, they should be *as good a people as any other* in the society" (WWF-India April 2010, emphasis added). Like the tigers versus tribals narrative, the ecodevelopment narrative reinforces the power disparities between Forest Department officials, NGO employees, and indigenous people living in and near tiger reserves.

Forest People versus Government

The forest people versus government counternarrative blames the government for tigers' and indigenous people's suffering and recommends indigenous management of tiger reserves as a solution. It vilifies the government and advocates for coexistence as the solution to tiger decline. As part of the appeal for coexistence, this narrative strategically essentializes indigenous people as the ecologically legitimate protectors of the forest. This story directly contradicts the hegemonic tigers versus tribals narrative, and is not as widely circulated. Samples

from environment and development and indigenous people's NGOs and several magazines and newspapers use this narrative.

The central assumption of forest people versus the government narrative is that people can coexist with tigers. This narrative highlights how the people and tigers are already living together. Ashish Kothari of Kalpavriksh and Nitin Rai of the Ashoka Trust for Research in Ecology and the Environment (ATREE) write, "Dogmatic [tiger conservationists] assert that people and tigers cannot co-exist. … how is it that every one of the tiger reserves that have been [created] in India, had communities living inside it at the time of [creation]?" (Feb 2011). They give examples of two tiger reserves, Biligiri Ranganathaswamy Temple and Nagarjunsagar-Srisailam, where tigers thrive alongside indigenous people. In his article in *Economic & Political Weekly*, activist C.R. Bijoy makes a similar claim: tigers and humans have always shared a habitat "…and have to coexist now and in the foreseeable future" (Bijoy Jan 2011). In a joint article in *Economic & Political Weekly* rebutting Bhargav and Dattatri, representatives of ATREE, Kalpavriksh, Vasundhara, and the National Forum of Forest People and Forest Workers (NFFPFW) point out that coexistence is a practical necessity; it would be impossible to find new homes for the three to four million Indians living in tiger reserves and other protected areas (Lele et al. May 2011). Finally, in more technical documents, NGOs approach coexistence from a legal angle. They condemn MoEF for ignoring people's right to stay in tiger reserves as enshrined in the WLPA and FRA (CSD 2008; ATREE et al. June 2011; CSD June 2011). NFFPFW, in its Dehradun Declaration, goes even further. It calls coexistence "…the law of nature…" and calls those who disobey that law, destructive and exploitative (June 2009).

MoEF and its subordinate, the Forest Department, are the villains who disrupt peaceful tiger-human coexistence. Ignoring the rights of indigenous forest dwellers, MoEF approves new

tiger reserves and the Forest Department restricts access to them. The Campaign for Survival and Dignity writes, "These illegal notifications have led to increased repression against forest dwellers in tiger reserves … and to violations of their rights… In several reserves across the country …efforts at relocation have already begun, even though such efforts are illegal at this time. There are reports of intensified harassment in several other tiger reserves…" (CSD 2008). Vasundhara tells the story of the Forest Department's underhanded campaign to force indigenous people out of Sunabeda Tiger Reserve in Orissa: It fabricated a *gram sabha* resolution agreeing to relocation, tricked people into signing an agreement to move, and then coerced them by cutting off government welfare programs in the forest villages (Orissa Protected Areas Network June 2007). Other samples document government abuses in Orissa, Maharashtra, West Bengal, and across India (Sanawar, Ghosh and Datta Jan 2008; Pallavi May 2008; Sathpathy and Jain May 2010; CSD Dec 2011). Every sample that uses the forest people versus government narrative, save one, mentions "rights." The terms "loss of access," "dispossession," "eviction," and "displacement" are very common instead of "resettlement" or "rehabilitation."

This story blames the government for tiger decline. Many authors accuse MoEF of hypocrisy from approving industrial projects that devastate acres of tiger habitat while simultaneously evicting indigenous people for using modest amounts of resources. *Down to Earth* reporter Aparna Pallavi is surprised to find the Maharashtra Forest Department constructing new roads in Tadoba Andhari Tiger Reserve, when it just razed Botezari village for tiger conservation. "The main reason the people of Botezari agreed to move out was because they didn't have a road. If the road can be made now, why couldn't it be made when Botezari was there? *Who is the road for?*" asks Shivaji Zumanke, a villager living in another part of the reserve (Pallavi May 2008, emphasis added). The answer, in this case, is for wealthy friends of

the local Forest Department officials, who are building resorts to capitalize on tourism to the tiger reserve (Pallavi May 2008).

The forest people versus government struggle is a classed conflict in which the government is replacing the legitimate forest dwellers with its fellow profit-seeking elite. Several samples suggest that the government violates indigenous people's rights in tiger reserves not to save tigers but to attract wealthy tourists (Pallavi May 2008; NFFPFW June 2009; Bijoy April 2011; Kothari and Rai Feb 2011). Two samples from the popular press also touch on this tension, ridiculing tourist companies for bringing tourists into the same core zones they want indigenous people to leave (Chauhan Nov 2011; Sethi 2011). After summarizing its member organizations' struggles against evictions, the Campaign for Survival and Dignity concludes, "… we see all talk of 'rule of law' and 'democracy' being brushed aside in the hideous loot of natural resources by the ruling class of this country" (CSD Dec 2011). This characterization positions indigenous people and tigers as co-victims of capitalist greed, so that the author can readily frame indigenous people as the tigers' allies.

In this narrative, indigenous peoples are active heroes, struggling to protect tiger reserves against capitalism, a corrupt state, and simple overuse. The story uses cultural essentialism to describe these people as protective of wildlife and forests. They are the ecologically legitimate residents of tiger reserves. Vasundhara argues for its indigenous allies' rights in Sunabeda Tiger Reserve in Orissa in terms of ecology identity: "Their socio-cultural life is woven around the principle of coexistence with the wildlife… These tribal people have been protecting the forest ecosystem and the wildlife since ages which they are doing as their sacred duty … It is this sense of duty and responsibility … that has sustained a symbiotic coexistence, integral to the survival of the entire forest ecosystem. The demand for the right to live in their land flows from this sense

of duty and responsibility which is part of the tribal ethos" (Orissa Protected Area Network July 2007). In this story, their demand for rights is not a political or economic demand to preserve their income but a moral imperative arising from their unique culture. Kalpavriksh and ATREE also use cultural essentialism to support the rights of their allies, the Soligas, to BRT Tiger Reserve: Soligas have "…deep historical and cultural links with forest…" and their traditional conservation practices sustain the environment and BRT's tiger population (Kothari and Rai Feb 2010). Finally, NFFPFW, an organization run by indigenous people, essentializes forest people as the forest itself: "We are the forests, forest are us" (NFFPFW June 2009). They claim ecological legitimacy not just as indigenous people, but as a broader class of "forest people" which includes "forest workers, Dalits [members of the untouchable castes], and [the] poor." In NFFPFW's story, forest people are the key to solving tiger decline and all environmental problems: "The crisis faced by our forests and environment today will only intensify without us" (NFFPFW June 2009).

The forest people versus government narrative offers an alternate way of understanding the turmoil in India's tiger reserves, as a conflict started by government appropriation. Coexistence between tigers and indigenous people is the beginning of the story and the suggested solution. This story often features cultural essentialism which frames indigenous people as natural protectors of tigers and forests. According to this narrative, the primary responsibility for forest and wildlife management ought to be returned to the local people through recognition of all their rights under the FRA.

Conclusion

  In summary, narratives used by NGOs and popular press generally follow three models: tigers versus tribals, ecodevelopment, or forest people versus the government. Tigers versus tribals is the hegemonic narrative, which positions tigers and indigenous people in fundamental conflict with each other. The NGO publications and popular press employing this story recommend relocation of all people from the core areas of tiger reserves, based on a concept of indigenous people as harmful to their local environment. The ecodevelopment narrative calls for NGO intervention to make people's behavior compatible with tiger conservation goals and characterizes indigenous people as in need of education and outside leadership. The counternarrative, forest people versus the government, blames the Ministry of the Environment and Forests for allowing destruction of tiger habitat while evicting indigenous people from those same forests. The heroes of this story are forest-dwelling people, who lead essentially sustainable lives and resist government attempts to appropriate their land.

Discussion and Conclusion

The hegemonic narrative, tigers versus tribals, justifies the Forest Department's harassment and eviction of indigenous people by blaming them for tiger decline. The tigers versus tribals narrative and the ecodevelopment narrative place the burden of accommodating tigers on indigenous people, who have very little flexibility to alter their resource use patterns. These two narratives also promote a misunderstanding about the Forest Rights Act and Wild Life (Protection) Act, that the laws mandate relocation from tiger reserves. The counternarrative, forest people versus the government, undermines this interpretation by providing more information on the content of the laws and by suggesting other actors are primarily responsible for tiger decline. But most samples overlook individual indigenous voices. Instead of quoting indigenous people, popular media and indigenous peoples' NGOs traffic in essentialist stereotypes.

The relentless advocacy of relocation, the rejection of coexistence, and the absence of "rights" in the hegemonic narrative affect Indian popular opinion. As Harini Nagendra of ATREE writes: "…local communities can be powerful allies for the forest. Indeed the recent provisions of the Forest Rights Act for local community rights to protect forests is based on this recognition. Despite this, an acceptance of this possibility in the public consciousness remains distant…" (June 2011). The legislative reform brought about by the FRA and the WLPA "Tiger Amendment" is insufficient in the face of popular perception that tigers require human-free areas.

Evictions and Violations of Rights

The hegemonic tigers versus tribals narrative justifies and normalizes the Indian government's refusal to grant forest rights in tiger reserves and its ongoing evictions from tiger reserves. The narrative blames indigenous people's overuse of resources and poaching for tiger decline and offers relocation from reserves as the only way to save the tiger. This narrative supports the Forest Department's monopoly over management in tiger reserves by presenting relocation as the only solution to tiger decline. Like all hegemonic narratives, it is "… hard to challenge and slow to change, even in the face of mounting evidence that does not support [it]" (Hoben 1995, 1008). This story enjoys wide currency in Indian English-language media, in spite of scientific evidence of successful tiger-human coexistence in certain reserves.

The tigers versus tribals narrative and the ecodevelopment narrative both ask that indigenous people accommodate tigers by altering their use of resources or leaving tiger reserves entirely. Why do these narratives put the burden of accommodating on this segment of the Indian population? Indigenous forest-dwelling people are generally poor and have few livelihood options. Relocating them for tigers is more damaging than relocating wealthier Indians who could use their greater resources and higher education levels to secure new jobs. The narratives also focus on indigenous people's behavior instead of industrial development, a major drives of tiger decline. Hydroelectric dams, roads, and mines have consumed 80 million hectares of government forest in the past thirty years (Krishnaswamy 2008, n.p). These projects' benefits flow primarily to Indians living in cities not indigenous forest-dwellers. It is unclear who is really overusing resources from tiger habitat. Blaming indigenous people ignores the critical threat to that industrial development poses to tigers. By focusing on only one cause, these narratives can lead to policy solutions that do not actually help the species.

Misreading the Law

The ecodevelopment and tigers versus tribals narratives also perpetuate confusion about the laws governing tiger reserves. Samples from newspapers and magazines explicitly reject coexistence and state. incorrectly that the WLPA mandates human-free tiger reserves. By omitting "rights" entirely, these two narratives perpetuate the idea that the FRA does not apply to tiger reserves.

My study suggests that the very notion of indigenous rights in tiger reserves, particularly the right to conserve, undermines hegemony. Recognizing that indigenous people can conserve the local environment threatens the Forest Department's longstanding monopoly over resource management in protected areas. The denial of rights is also necessary for conservation NGOs to construct indigenous people as recipients of ecodevelopment. If forest-dwelling people have rights to collect NTFPs, to sustain themselves without Forest Department harassment, then NGOs will not be able to persuade them to change their behavior. If people can legally collect and sell resources from their forest homes and manage their local ecosystems, they could coordinate their own ecodevelopment without NGO intervention. Thus, ignoring rights is a central part of both tigers versus tribals and ecodevelopment narratives.

This misreading of the FRA and WLPA has serious and concrete consequences for indigenous people. In 2010, the National Committee on Forest Rights Act found "In many states it has been wrongly believed, or conveyed, that tiger reserves are exempted from the FRA" (Dec 2010, 20). The Forest Department has resisted recognition of any FRA rights in tiger reserves (National Committee on Forest Rights Act 2010; Bhaya and Pathak 2011). Since the FRA came into force in 2008, the Department has already evicted people from Tadoba Andhari, Simlipal,

Sariska, Ranthambore, and Udanti Tiger Reserves without any settlement of rights, and it is pressuring more people to leave (Nation Committee on Forest Rights Act 2010). Furthermore, the agencies which oversee the Department, MoEF and the National Tiger Conservation Authority, "… are continuing to support (monetarily and otherwise) such relocation, without checking on whether legal requirements and guidelines relating to the notification of tiger reserves and critical tiger habitats, and of carrying out relocation, have been met" (National Committee on Forest Rights Act 2010, 50). The hegemonic narrative, tigers versus tribals, legitimates these ongoing violations of the FRA and WLPA.

There is an odd bifurcation occurring in India's tiger reserves. On paper, indigenous people are promised rights to collect NTFPs, farm, graze their livestock, and live even the core zones of reserves. The FRA and WLPA recognize that tigers and people can coexist successfully, given the right conditions. On the other hand, many English-language stories about tiger reserves ignore the historical reality of coexistence and the laws allowing it. They perpetuate the idea that coexistence is impossible, illegal, and undesirable.

Essentialism in the Counternarrative

The forest people versus the government narrative challenges the hegemony of the Forest Department through essentialist claims of ecological legitimacy. These claims offer a strong alternative characterization – that of the hero – and agency for a group of people who are otherwise characterized as passive and ignorant or active but villainous. This strategic essentialization can empower indigenous people. As a purely cultural argument, any self-identified indigenous person, whether or not she has official Scheduled Tribe status, can use the strategy to reinforce her claim to forest resources. Furthermore, forest people's organizations

like the Campaign for Survival and Dignity and the National Forum of Forest Peoples and Forest Workers (NFFPFW) have expanded the notion of ecological legitimacy to embrace all "forest people" including poor workers and low-caste Hindus. NFFPFW claims ecological legitimacy: "We, the forest people of the world – living in the woods, surviving on the fruits and crops…re-cultivating the forest land, roaming around with our herds – have occupied this land since ages. We announce loudly, in unity and solidarity… we are the forests, and the forests are us and our existence is mutually dependent" (NFFPFW June 2009). Thus, a cultural claim for ecological legitimacy becomes a rallying point for all forest-dwelling people.

In spite of the strengths of cultural essentialism as used in the forest people versus the government narrative, there is a risk in defining the "good" indigenous person as ecologically sustainable (Karlsson 2000). What happens to their claims to forest rights when they do not behave as a good indigenous person should, when they use resources in an sustainable way? I suppose that if the forest people versus government narrative becomes widely circulate and accepted, and the FRA is fully implemented, this question will not matter. The rights will be recognized, the titles issued, and the matter closed. If the millions of indigenous people gain communal rights to conserve these landscapes, as promised in the FRA, then they will be able to create and revise their own particular, localized definition of "ecologically sustainable behavior."

The Way Forward

Although the forest people versus government story is the counternarrative to the tigers versus tribals, they share a common feature: an absence of the voices of real, individual indigenous people. The absence of quotes from indigenous people in the 50 samples is staggering. NFFPFW and the Campaign for Survival and Dignity, both led by indigenous people,

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do not incorporate quotations in their publications. On the other hand, newspapers and magazines frequently quote people in stories about tiger reserves, but not indigenous people themselves. They quote forest officials and NGO employees. The journalists talk about moving indigenous people, convincing them, educating them, and developing them but never talk *to* them. Madhavi Tata's *Down to Earth* article about relocating Chenchu people from Nagarjunasagar-Srisailam Tiger Reserve is typical. It quotes two Forest Department officials and three representatives from NGOs, asking their opinions about the effects of the proposed relocation on Chenchus, their health, and their livelihood. Tata herself seems aware of the limitations of interviewing only outsiders. She writes, "… the assistant [Forest Department] conservator at the [tiger reserve] speaks of the [relocation] programme as one of coexistence, one that will benefit the people and the tiger. It remains to be seen if the Chenchus, who are the key to the successful implementation of this programme, perceive it that way" (Tata June 2010).

I think the best way forward in this debate is to complicate the representation of indigenous people in all narratives. An excellent model is Aparna Pallavi's article in *Down to Earth* about relocation from Tadoba Andhari Tiger Reserve. She explores how the Forest Department pressured indigenous residents to leave the reserve and banned their religious procession, because ritual drinking and animal sacrifice upset visiting tourists (Pallavi April 2008). This story quotes thirteen different indigenous people, five Forest Department officials, and two NGO employees. Pallavi avoids essentializing the indigenous villagers as harmful or helpful to the environment, focusing instead on their self-stated desire for access to NTFPs and basic infrastructure.

Substituting cultural essentialism of indigenous people with real quotations will provide more information to the Indian public about the costs and benefits of relocation to indigenous

people. Indigenous people's opinions are absolutely necessary for the humane implementation of the FRA and WLPA, for tiger conservation projects that respect both tiger and human needs. Quoting indigenous people also challenges the colonial concept of indigenous people as passive objects to be manipulated. Indigenous people have been struggling for land rights at least since the time of British colonialism. If narratives include indigenous people talking about their own struggles, the Forest Department might finally acknowledge that the people in the tiger reserves are, by law, there to stay. But without these voices, the tigers versus tribals dichotomy could continue to dominate the public debate, justifying government dispossession and displacement in the name of the tiger.

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Appendix A: Table of Samples

Category	Source	Title, Tiger Reserve Involved, and In-text Citation		
Newspapers	*The Times of India*	Tribals move to court Kawal Paithari Feb 2012	Tiger tourism brings little… All India Sethi Nov 2011	Mahabaleshwar farmers oppose… Sahyadri TNN Oct 2011
	Hindustan Times	Stop tourism in core tiger areas All India Chauhan Nov 2011	Tigers can survive with humans All India Chauhan June 2011	Tigers' hope in Ranthambore Ranthambore *Hindustan Times* Feb 2010
	The Hindu	Tiger reserve tag for BRT… Biligiri Ranganthaswamy Khajane Jan 2011	Nagpur to be promoted as… Maharashtra *The Hindu* April 2011	You can hear the roar… Biligiri Ranganthaswamy Paneesha Oct 2010
	The Telegraph	Three elephants killed Simlipal Mishra Nov 2011	Villagers stay put in tiger… Palamau Mukesh May 2011	'New life' after 37-year fight… BRT Rakesh Nov 2011
	Deccan Chronicle	Hunters enter Nallamala Nagarjunasagar-Srisailam *Deccan Chronicle* Feb 2012	Tribesmen are the biggest… Karnataka *Deccan Chronicle* Jan 2012	Tribals oppose reserve Kawal *Deccan Chronicle* Dec 2011
Magazines	*Outlook*	… Tribals attack offices… Dudhwa PTI Jan 2012	Changing their stripes Nagarjunasagar-Srisailam Tata June 2010	
	The Week	Crackers and causalities… Niligiri Biosphere Reserve *The Week* "Cracker" Oct 2011	Slack of interest Niligiri Biosphere Reserve *The Week* "Slack" Oct 2011	
	India Today			
	Tehelka	Centre sets Rs 10 lakh… All India Dutta Feb 2011	We do not wish to be relocated Karnataka Khan Oct 2011	
	Economic & Political Weekly	Protecting Indian's protected... All India Bhargav and Dattatri April 2011	The great Indian tiger show All India Bijoy Jan 2011	
	Down to Earth	Tadoba: unsafe haven Tadoba Andhari Pallavi May 2008	Finally community rights BRT Shrivastava Oct 2011	

Category	Source	Title, Tiger Reserve Involved, and In-text Citation				
Environment and development, indigenous people's NGOs	Kalpavriksh	In the name… All India Bhaya and Kothari Nov 2010	Legislation brief… All India Bhaya and Pathak 2011	...include Soligas… BRT Kothari and Rai Feb 2011	Misreading the issues All India Lele et al. May 2011	Comments on draft… All India ATREE et al. June 2011
	Ashoka Trust for Research in Ecology and the Environment	An eye on the forests All India Nagendra June 2011	...include Soligas…		Misreading the issues	Comments on draft….
	Vasundhara	Draft report on eviction Sunabeda Orissa Protected Area Network July 2007	Out of the green, into the dust Simlipal Sathpathy and Jain May 2010		Comments on draft…	
	Campaign for Survival and Dignity (CSD)	Illegal notification … All India CSD 2008	MoEF draft guidelines… All India CSD June 2011		Protest and repression… All India CSD Dec 2011	
	National Forum of Forest Peoples and Forest Workers	Dehradun declaration All India NFFPFW June 2009	Press conference: Recognition … All India Sanawar, Ghosh and Datta Jan 2008		Misreading the issues	
Conservation NGOs	Wildlife Protection Society of India	India's tiger poaching All India WPSI "Poaching" 2012	Current status of tiger in India All India WPSI "Current" 2012		Support to Sundarban Tiger Reserve Sundarban WPSI "Support" 2012	
	Wildlife Trust of India	Reducing dependence Maharashtra WTI Nov 2011	Todas for tigers Tamil Nadu WTI Aug 2008		Altering lifestyles for tiger… Valmiki July 2008	
	WWF-India	Conserving frontiers … Achanakmar WWF-India July 2011	Change through education Panna WWF-India April 2010		Cattle compensation All India WWF-India "Cattle" 2009	
	Wildlife Conservation Society-India	It can be painless All India Gubbi August 2010	Free to move…. Bhadra, Kudremukh, Nagarahole Karanth and Karanth 2007		Wandering tigers… All India Gubbi July 2011	

Appendix B: List of Final Codes

Narratives

- Problem
- Explanation of problem
- Solution
- Characters
    - Victim
    - Villain
    - Hero
- References to rights
- Explanation of tiger decline

Essentialization

- Name ("tribal," "*adivasi*," "indigenous," etc.)
- Adjective
- Subject/object of verb (grammatical)
- Prescriptive
- Indigenous people described in relation to non-indigenous people
- Quotations from indigenous people
- Role
    - Victim
    - Villain
    - Hero