“We Call Ourselves Marginalized”: Young People’s Environmental Learning and Navigations of Marginalization in a Kenyan Pastoralist Community

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Abstract

In recent decades, indigenous knowledge has been added to the environmental education agenda in an attempt to address the marginalization of non-western perspectives. While these efforts are necessary, the debate is often framed in terms of a discourse of victimization that overlooks the agency of the people we refer to as marginalized. In this paper, I discuss how young secondary school graduates from a pastoralist community in Kenya use and negotiate indigeneity, marginal identity, and experiences of marginalization in social navigations aimed at broadening their current and future opportunities. I argue that researchers not only need to pay attention to how certain voices are marginalized in environmental education research and practice, but also to how learners as agents respond to, use, and negotiate the marginalization of their perspectives.

Résumé

Au cours des dernières décennies, les connaissances autochtones ont été intégrées au champ de l’éducation environnementale dans l’espoir d’adresser la question de la marginalisation des perspectives non occidentales. Bien que ces efforts soient nécessaires, le débat est souvent conçu de telle façon qu’il aboutit à un discours de victimisation qui néglige l’action des populations que nous appelons marginalisées. Dans le présent article, je décris comment, dans une communauté pastorale du Kenya, des jeunes ayant terminé leurs études secondaires utilisent et négocient leur indigénéité, leur identité marginale et leurs expériences de marginalisation dans des cheminements sociaux visant à élargir leurs perspectives actuelles et futures. Ce travail soutient l’idée que les chercheurs doivent prêter attention non seulement à la marginalisation de certaines voix dans la recherche et les pratiques en éducation environnementale, mais aussi à la réaction des étudiants envers la marginalisation de leurs perspectives, ainsi que leur façon de s’en servir et de la négocier.

Keywords: environmental learning, indigenous knowledge, learner’s agency, marginalization, social navigation, Kenya

Introduction

> So in terms of what the government has done … we call ourselves marginalized communities. You have seen the road network from Nanyuki up to here. We don't have electricity. The water, if you go to the Ministry of Water, the boreholes are countable. But now we can see that God is assisting us because we will have our own member of parliament. We will be having our own constituency development funds and we will expand our own road network. (Quote from group interview with young men from Laikipia North, Kenya, March 21, 2012)

The concept of "marginalization" and the label "marginalized" has for decades been used in global discourses to bring political or academic attention to the plight of specific groups or segments that have been oppressed, ignored, or sidelined. Within environmental education and education for sustainable development, both practice and research, one topic of discussion on marginalization has been the dominance of "western" knowledge within the field, marginalizing "indigenous" knowledge and ways of knowing about the environment (cf. Korteweg & Russell, 2012; Russell & Fawcett, 2013). Indigenous knowledge has been widely analyzed and discussed within other academic fields (e.g., Dei, Hall, & Rosenberg, 2000) and has been a part of the environmental education debate since the 1970s with the Tbilisi Conference in 1977 (see Van Damme & Neluvhalani, 2004), but until recently, the topic has received relatively little attention among environmental education and education for sustainable development scholars. A few articles reviewing the field have discussed the history of the introduction of indigenous knowledge to the global environmental education agenda (Shava, 2013; van Damme & Neluvhalani, 2004), highlighted the contested nature of definitions and representations of indigenous knowledge (Reid, Teamey, & Dillon, 2002; Shava, 2012; van Damme & Neluvhalani, 2004), and analyzed the use and place of indigenous knowledge in environmental education, as well as discussing possible future directions (Reid et al., 2002, 2004). Examples of empirical research into environmental education and indigenous knowledge have primarily focused on environmental education programs in North America and Southern Africa that attempt to include or build upon indigenous knowledge in their curricula (for reviews of this research, see Lowan-Trudeau, 2013; van Damme & Neluvhalani, 2004. See also Volume 17 of the *Canadian Journal of Environmental Education*).

While not disputing the need for critical approaches to dominating western representations of environmental learning and knowing, in line with Reid et al. (2002) and van Damme & Neluvhalani (2004), I argue that the emphasis on indigenous knowledge runs the risk of dichotomizing western and indigenous knowledge into separate systems, thereby failing to acknowledge the ways in which knowledge traditions inspire one another, change, and localize (cf. Dei et al., 2000), thus reinforcing dominant modernist categories of tradition and modernity. Furthermore, discussions on indigenous knowledge and indigeneity are often accompanied by the label "marginalized," in many cases resulting in one-sided and morally loaded representations of indigenous people as poor, noble savages who are the victims of global, national, and local power dynamics. While such representations carry some truth and may be effective in terms of advocacy, they risk concealing the agency of people from indigenous communities and their complex uses and negotiations of positions of marginality and indigeneity. In this paper I seek to contribute to discussions on voices from the margins of environmental education research by arguing that researchers and practitioners need to pay attention not only to how certain voices are marginalized in environmental education research and practice, but also to how learners as agents respond to, use, and negotiate marginalization of their perspectives. Based on an empirical analysis of the social navigations of young secondary school graduates from a Maasai pastoralist[1] community in Kenya, I suggest that attention to what people do in the "gaps" (Tsing, 2005) between "modern" western and "traditional" indigenous knowledge may challenge our views of marginalization, demonstrating that while the label "marginalized" can be constraining, it can also be enabling, opening new opportunities for individuals and groups.

The paper is based on data from fieldwork conducted in Kenya during early 2012 in a rural town centre in the (newly created) Laikipia North District, and in the nearest larger town, Nanyuki. Employing an ethnographic, qualitative approach, the aim was to explore the relationships between young people's environmental learning and their agency in environmental conflicts. The discussions presented in this article draw in particular on interviews with young secondary school graduates living in the rural town centre and in Nanyuki, focusing on their environmental learning experiences, and on interviews with teachers regarding their environmental education aims and approaches. Additional data sources include documents (selected teaching materials, policy documents, civil society publications, and census data); interviews and informal discussions with development professionals in government or civil society positions; participant observation at two schools and at community events related to environmental management; and discussions on social media in which several of the aforementioned young people participated.[2]

Before moving on to a discussion of discourses on indigenous, pastoralist learning and practices in the Kenyan school system and among social justice activists, and subsequently of young people's social navigations of indigeneity and marginality, I will start with a brief outline of the theoretical perspectives on learning, agency, and marginalization underlying my analysis.

A Theoretical Perspective on Learning, Agency, and Marginalization

Discussions on indigenous knowledge often represent their subject as practical and context-bound, as opposed to western knowledge, which is considered abstract and theoretical (e.g., UNESCO, 2009). My research, on the other hand, is based on an understanding of all learning, including learning within “western” or “modern” school systems, as situated in specific practices and contexts. I draw in particular on educational theories of situated learning, as conceptualized by Lave & Wenger (1991). Lave & Wenger argue against cognitive theories of learning that conceptualize learning as limited in space and time, knowledge as existing outside the context of learning, and learning as acquiring and internalizing cognitive skills and knowledge. They propose that learning should be considered as a part of the way people participate in social practices and relations (Lave & Wenger, 1991). This theoretical orientation turns attention to learning processes and practices, rather than elements of knowledge. It highlights that learning in school is not just about acquiring a body of universal knowledge, but about becoming part of a specific, historically, and socio-culturally contextualized practice that may draw on a western knowledge tradition, but practice it in a specific way. In other words, while the school system in Kenya is developed in reference to a European and, in particular, British way of thinking about school, the actual schooling practices, and thus the ways of learning, are specific to the national and local context. In the same way, learning outside school takes place in practical and social processes in which different learning and knowledge traditions intertwine in context-specific ways. The focus on learning processes has enabled me to shed light on the ways that young people’s environmental learning experiences are formed by their participation in and movements between a number of different learning contexts at home, in school, in the community, as well as through media use. These complex “learning trajectories” (Lave & Wenger, 1991) form the backdrop for young people’s responses to experiences of marginalization.

My approach to marginality is inspired by Tsing (1993, 2005). In her monograph, *In the Realm of the Diamond Queen* (1993), Tsing approaches the cultural and political construction of marginality by exploring ethnographically how a specific minority group, the Meratus Dayak in Indonesia, is created as marginalized in national, regional, and global institutions and ideologies, and how the Meratus on the one hand accept and are formed by this positioning, while on the other hand respond, reinterpret, and challenge it. Tsing’s perspective is fruitful for the analysis of marginality, because it enables us to recognize the power of dominating discourses while at the same time acknowledging the agency of people marginalized by them.

As further discussed below, in Kenya, as in many other African countries, the discourses and practices of the school system marginalize non-school ways of knowing about the environment. Young secondary school graduates from Laikipia North are strongly influenced by the school discourse, but at the same time, they carry with them other environmental learning experiences, grounded in learning trajectories shaped and formed by practices in home and community. These include local practices that could be termed “indigenous” or “traditional,” such as livestock keeping and other livelihood practices. But they also include practices drawing on national and global discourses on development, for instance related to rights, justice, and participation and representation of marginalized groups, brought to young people through new political developments, NGO activities, and through their use of media.[3]

Tsing's work on marginality illustrates how Meratus community leaders negotiate marginality by claiming agency from "fragments of dominant discourse" (Tsing, 1993, p. 255). In her later book *Friction: An Ethnography of Global Connection* (2005), Tsing deals in more detail with the complex interactions between the global and the local. When analyzing global connections, she encourages us to look at the gaps between universals: "the conceptual spaces and real places into which powerful demarcations do not travel well" (Tsing, 2005, p. 175). My analysis of young people's responses to the environmental morality of the school and the general social and political marginalization of pastoralist perspectives, inspired by Tsing, looks into the ways that young people move in the gaps between the modernistic categories of western and indigenous knowledge. As their movements take place in contexts and situations where (environmental) knowledge claims are contested due to social change brought about by, among other things, the rising level of schooling, the growing presence of NGOs and government institutions in the district, national and local political dynamics, and the increasing access to media, I propose considering them as social navigations.

Social navigation, according to Vigh (2006), is an analytical concept illustrating how agents steer through unstable and changing social and political situations and circumstances, simultaneously navigating their past, immediate, and imagined future position and possibilities. Navigation highlights the experience and agency of young people, but at the same time also the dynamic social forces that form and limit their actions and experiences (Vigh, 2006). The concept will help shed light on the ways that young people in Laikipia North draw on "eclectic perspectives" (Tsing, 2005), trying to avoid being stigmatized by marginalization while simultaneously mobilizing an identity as marginalized to broaden their opportunities for accessing resources, recognition, and political voice.

Discourses on Pastoralist Environmental Learning

Although situated more or less in the centre of Kenya, in terms of landscape and livelihood practices, Laikipia North District (which covers the Northern part of Laikipia county) is more closely affiliated with what is often termed "Northern Kenya" than with the agricultural land further south in Laikipia county. Northern Kenya is an area characterized by arid or semi-arid land that is highly exposed to drought and climate change, a local economy based on pastoralism or agro-pastoralism, poor infra-structure, and a political history of isolation and marginalization by first the colonial powers and later the independent Kenyan nation state.

The Northern part of Kenya has also historically been marginalized in terms of access to formal education. In spite of the introduction of free primary education in Kenya in 2003, resulting in a general increase in enrolment rates at the national level, enrolment rates in the pastoralist areas of Northern Kenya are still low, drop-out rates high, and very few students make the transition from primary to secondary school (Ruto, Ongwenyi, & Mugo, 2009). In Laikipia North District, where the majority of the population identify as Maasai pastoralists, school enrolment rates are currently increasing, even though this tendency is primarily apparent in urban areas. In the rural areas only 7% of males and 3% of females had reached the secondary school level in 2009, while in urban areas the percentages were 30% for males and 18% for females in the same period (National Census, 2009).

While global and Kenyan policy documents on environmental education and education for sustainable development highlight the need for integration of indigenous knowledge into environmental teachings,[4] this integration has not yet found its way into the formal Kenyan curriculum (Subject Officer, Kenya Institute of Education, personal communication, May 29, 2012). One example of the marginalization of other ways of learning about the environment is the devaluation of pastoralist environmental learning and livelihood practices.

My research from Laikipia North suggests that discourses and practices in school encourage a morality promoting individual farming and land ownership, while devaluing pastoralism and communal land ownership. It is thus a dominant attitude in the Kenyan curriculum (which is primarily taught through rote learning): that pastoralism and communal land ownership have negative effects on environmental conservation, exemplified in the description of land tenure systems in the agricultural textbook for Form 3 (3rd year of secondary school). On "communal land tenure system," the author states that the consequence of equal rights to the use of land is that individual community members tend to "take as much land as possible for arable farming or grazing more animals than the land can support" (Kenya Literature Bureau, 2011, pp. 140-141). The text later claims that the individual tenure system "provides the greatest incentive in farming, conservation and improvement of land" (Kenya Literature Bureau, 2011, p. 143).

The majority of teachers in the schools in and around the rural town centre in Laikipia North come from sedentary farming communities, and their opinions are generally in line with the message of the textbook. One such example is a teacher from a secondary school who, in response to my question about how he views the local community, underlined how far behind people are in terms of development and environmental conservation. When later on asked how he advises his students to improve their livelihoods after finishing school, he answered that he encourages them to buy land elsewhere in more productive (less arid) areas, and continued:

> We try and educate them to come from where they are, where the land is owned communally, and move to some place where they will own land individually. So that when you own the land individually, you have that element of developing the land, conserving the land. But when the land is owned communally, we keep on blaming each other. (Geography teacher, personal communication, May 15, 2012)

The negative view on pastoralist environmental practices expressed in curricula and teachers' opinions was further emphasized by the school practices I observed during my fieldwork. For instance, in the classroom, most teachers discouraged the use of other learning experiences and focused almost exclusively on repeating textbook expressions. In environmental activities outside the classroom, emphasis was put on teaching the pastoralist students how to plant and nurture trees, flowers, and crops, and to value environmental conservation in the form of wildlife protection. Furthermore, the disciplinary practices of the schools very explicitly advised against too much contact between school and home, limiting the contact between parents and students and discouraging students from bringing, for instance, their status as *morans* (circumcised young men rather than boys) to the fore in school life.

My empirical findings suggest that the discourses and situated learning practices of schooling in Laikipia North form a dominant environmental morality that works to marginalize other learning experiences, in particular those rooted in pastoralist livelihood practices. This analysis is in line with other anthropological studies that have highlighted the ways that schooling in Africa is part of national modernization and civilization projects, with roots in colonial mission efforts that showed a preference for livelihoods based on farming (e.g., Comaroff & Comaroff, 1997). As a consequence, non-farming ways of living and knowing were, and in most cases still are, sidelined. A number of research projects carried out in East Africa have pointed to the ways that the pastoralist perspective has been marginalized in the formal education system, and the ways that schooling encourages the uptake of farming and individual land ownership (e.g., Bishop, 2007; Lesorogol, 2008). Schooling in Kenya thus promotes an environmental morality built on global and regional discourses, idealizing commercial farming and private land ownership which, in turn, marginalizes pastoralists' environmental perspectives. The morality reproduces somewhat stereotypical modernist ideas with roots in colonialism, which position sedentary farming as modern and civilized, and (nomadic) pastoralism as traditional and wild (cf. Comaroff & Comaroff, 1997).

Although the environmental morality described above seems to be the dominant one in Kenya, it does not, of course, exist unchallenged. Scholars researching pastoralist livelihoods have for at least two decades deconstructed discourses linking pastoralism to environmental degradation (e.g., Bishop, 2007), and activists working for social and environmental justice promote traditional pastoralist and indigenous knowledge as intrinsically beneficial to environmental conservation, presenting indigenous people as victims of modern development.

For example, Rogei (2012) from the Simba Maasai Outreach Organization writes about indigenous peoples "who depend entirely on their natural environment and traditional sociocultural, economic, and spiritual life skills" being "at a great risk of assimilation and subsequent extermination" (para. 4). And the Maasai activitist and politician, Kaunga (2008) from Laikipia, tells us that being indigenous means being a victim of displacement, dispossession, domination, oppression, and exclusion, and "fighting endless battles with rigid state governments, multinationals and, at times, development thinking and processes that tend to further marginalize our voices and rights" (p. 8). Other social justice activists participating in events observed during my fieldwork evoked the same image of the indigenous Maasais, whose traditional livelihood practices conserve the environment, and of the modern state oppressing the indigenous perspective. Social justice discourses in favour of indigenous pastoralist livelihoods are thus often phrased in the same modernist categories as the school discourse, being just as morally loaded, although inversing the moral content.

I certainly do not dispute Kaunga's and other activists' claims about injustices done to indigenous people and the need to redress those. However, I do find it important to be aware of the ways in which the moral connotations of categories of indigeneity, tradition, and marginality (whether positive or negative) may mask the complexities of lived life in communities classified as indigenous, and how the categories are used tactically by people in those communities.

Tsing (2005) proposes that we look past modernist binary demarcations by paying attention to what happens in the gaps between them. In the last section of this article, I will examine these gaps by exploring how young people navigate positions of marginality through simultaneously drawing on categories of both tradition and modernity.

Navigating Marginality

The young secondary school graduates from Laikipia North whom I interviewed during my fieldwork consisted of people in their mid-twenties whose environmental learning experiences were shaped by diverse and disparate learning contexts. While growing up, they participated both in the livelihood and cultural practices of their community, and in school practices. Moreover, their school experience had enabled them to become involved in different development activities organized by a rising number of NGOs in the area (dealing with, for example, environmental conservation, livelihood improvements, and rights and justice), and to make use of new technology and communication (in particular, cell phones). The learning experiences of school had created among these young people a strong awareness of the devaluation of pastoralism within the environmental morality of school, as well as of their marginalized political position within the nation state and in local politics, and the (perceived) lack of development in their community. At the same time, their status as "learned" allowed them to negotiate generational hierarchies within the community, aspire to community leadership, and turn to national and international actors as advocates for development and political representation.

In this section I will present two examples of ways in which young secondary school graduates navigated marginality by making use of their diverse learning experiences. First, when discussing environmental learning, they challenged the dichotomy between modern and traditional knowledge by ascribing moral value to both positions. Second, navigating between the two identity positions of (a) modern, learned young people and (b) members of a marginalized, indigenous, traditional group, they used their knowledge of historical and contemporary political developments in Kenya in attempts to gain access to resources and influence.

The Complex Morality of Environmental Learning Experiences

In a series of interviews, I asked young people to tell me about how they had learned about environmental issues during their lifetimes. Most of them started out with very elaborate descriptions of learning from parents and other adults about how to herd and take care of livestock, how to move in the landscape (e.g., avoiding wild animals), how to collect firewood or water (women), and how to collect and use medicinal herbs (mostly men). In addition, the young men especially talked about the way they had learned about traditional, cultural rules for conservation of environmental resources from elders in the community. In these descriptions, they often expressed themselves in terms of the modernist categories of tradition and modernity, but (in line with the social/environmental justice discourse discussed above) using them to challenge the moral positioning of local environmental learning and practices as destructive to the environment.

One of my key informants, Robert (a pseudonym), dropped out of school in Standard 4 (4th year of primary school), and became a *moran* (the word actually referring to any young man who has been circumcised, but in daily usage mostly in reference to young men who are out of school and spend their time herding livestock). With the introduction of free primary education in Kenya, however, Robert decided to go back to school after several years, initially to finish primary school, but subsequently managing to secure himself a scholarship for secondary school. At the time of the research he worked for an NGO in Nanyuki while hoping to pursue further education. In an interview in which we had talked about the daily life and learning experiences of *morans*, I asked him if what he learned in school about the environment was different from what he had learned as a *moran*. He answered:

> Yes, but I think the traditional culture has more respect for the environment than the modern culture. In our culture you can't cut a fig tree, it is like a curse. … But in the modern culture people don't care, you just cut a tree because it is a tree. … So tradition had a lot of respect on environment … I tend to think that the traditional

> culture is better than the modern culture in terms of environmental management and conservation. (Robert, personal communication, April 19, 2012)

This view, mirrored in several other interviews with youth, draws on a comparison of modernist concepts of tradition (indigenous) and modernity (western) in order to emphasize the environmentally friendly aspects of local knowledge and practices, while criticizing schooling for resulting in the deterioration of traditional culture. Furthermore, some of the young people, in line with a NGO working with rangeland management in the area, underlined the values of communal land ownership and the effectiveness of traditional environmental management practices. Such statements, I argue, express a response and challenge to the marginalization and exclusion of local culture, tradition, and practices in the school system, which are at the same time shaped by the dominant categories (cf. Tsing, 1993).

However, the interviews with young people also included sections on environmental learning in school. In these descriptions they talked about environmental activities, and science and agriculture lessons, making it clear to me that they valued their school knowledge and their status as learned. School had inspired several of them to start up farming projects using scientifically inspired farming methods, buying land, or initiating individual business (thus acting in line with the environmental morality of the school). An example of this appeared in an interview with another young man, Daniel (also a pseudonym), who had finished secondary school and gone to college. In response to my question about what he had learned about the environment in school, and how he was using it today, he told me that in high school he had learned "modern" methods of livestock management, agriculture, and general development, and that he would like to use this knowledge to change his community. He continued,

> Yes I respect our culture, I respect the way we are doing things, but we have to change some things because the world is changing. … When the drought comes, it clears all our livestock. We had 700 cows now we have 20. So how does such a person survive if he has three wives and 20 children? You have to engage yourself in other alternative livelihoods. … You see the school knowledge I have got, and my other experience plus the several training [courses] I have attended; that is what I'm using to develop my place. (Daniel, personal communication, March 14, 2012)

In other words, while clearly making use of the dichotomy between tradition and modernity, Daniel and other young secondary school graduates, contrary to the discourses of school and social justice activists, refused a clear moral valuation of the two positions. Rather, navigating in what may be seen as a gap between tradition and modernity, they proposed a melange. As formulated by Robert: "I think if people would integrate traditional and modern systems, [environmental] conservation would be a little bit easier."

I suggest that the ways in which young people narrated their environmental learning experiences introduce a complex morality which ascribes value to both modern science and traditional/indigenous knowledge and practice. In their descriptions of environmental learning experiences, the young secondary school graduates challenged the stigmatizing identity as marginalized, indigenous, environmentally destructive pastoralists ascribed to them in the environmental discourse of the school. At the same time, however, they also challenged the romantic picture of indigenous knowledge and practice being the only way to protect the environment and the livelihood of pastoralists, promoted in social justice discourses. Navigating in this way, young people, I propose, made use of the gaps between the categories of tradition and modernity to negotiate and challenge modernist discourses.

Mobilizing Marginal Identities

Another way in which the young secondary school graduates negotiated positions of marginalization was through actively mobilizing a marginal identity in navigations aimed at accessing resources and influence. One example of this was seen in the attempts to obtain political representation within the framework of Kenya's new constitution. Another example was seen in discussions on, and advocacy efforts for, land redistribution.

With Kenya's new constitution promising representation and affirmative action for minorities and marginalized groups (see e.g., Laws of Kenya, 2010, chapter 3, §56), a new political space may be opening up for those groups to gain more influence. In addition, the demarcation of new electoral boundaries brought the hope of more political influence for groups that had hitherto been minorities in their constituencies. The opening quote of this article is an example of how a group of young people from the rural town centre in Laikipia North claim a position as marginalized within a discussion on development and politics. The young people participating in the interview had been involved in the process of advocating for a new constituency in Laikipia North. They argued that the Maasai population was a severely marginalized minority in the former constituency, resulting in a lack of attention to development in the area (the aspects most often highlighted were roads, electricity, water, and schools). Apart from being strongly represented in my interviews, the argument was brought up in several public meetings in the area, and also formed part of discussions on social forums on the internet, the participants being mostly young people from the area who had attended school. It was linked to wider discussions on Maasai indigenous identity and the historical and contemporary injustices the group has experienced in colonial and post-colonial times, especially in relation to land alienation. In Laikipia, a very large percentage of the land was occupied by white settlers during the colonial period and still is in white hands (for a detailed account of the history of land alienation, see Hughes, 2006), and for more than 10 years, local civil society groups, in collaboration with international partners, have advocated for a redistribution of land in the area. While space does not allow me to describe this case in detail, in this context I want to highlight how young people in meetings with civil society groups and in internet discussions presented themselves as representatives of an indigenous community and victims of "systematic marginalization" (quote from a discussion on Facebook), arguing either that the land should go back to the Maasai or that they should be compensated for their loss.

The identity as marginalized, indigenous people was mobilized by young people both in conversations with "outsiders," such as civil society and government representatives from elsewhere in Kenya or researchers such as myself, and in internal discussions among youth from Laikipia North (on the internet and in real life). However, in other situations, the young people emphasized their identity as modern, learned people with an understanding of the workings of national political developments, law and government structures, modern technology, and global trends, for example. This identity was for instance mobilized in discussions with members of older generations in the community, and worked to generate some respect which would normally not be associated with people of their relatively young age. To me they explained that it was exactly their modern school knowledge that enabled them to understand the mechanisms of marginalization of indigenous groups. By navigating in this way between identities as modern and traditional, western and indigenous, they therefore used, but also reinterpreted and challenged, dominant ideas about marginalization (cf. Tsing, 1993).

Young people drew on their diverse practical learning experiences to steer clear of the potentially stigmatizing and constraining aspects of being identified as traditional and marginalized pastoralists. Making use of their experiences from participation in development activities, and their access to information about political trends and developments, they instead tried to mobilize an identity of being marginalized, which seemed to have the potential to broaden the possibilities (both individually and in a community perspective) of gaining access to resources and development. This did not happen in the form of a long-term strategic plan, but rather as navigations in upcoming and changing situations and events (cf. Vigh, 2006).

Concluding Remarks

In this article I have attempted to illustrate how the young people in Laikipia North I interacted with during my fieldwork used diverse learning experiences, their experiences of marginalization, and their awareness of marginalization discourses in navigations aimed at gaining access to resources and development. In doing so, they showed that marginality in this context is a contested concept, which may be both a constraint and an enabling resource to the people who are labelled with it.

To outsiders, mobilizations of marginalized identities such as those described here sometimes look like manipulations. While doing my fieldwork in Laikipia, I interviewed and had informal talks with a number of development professionals and a few scholars who had worked with issues of social and environmental justice in the area where my study was set. Quite a number of them expressed disappointment with what was seen as community members' dishonest representations, selfish political games, anti-communal conflicts, and tactical wiles aimed at getting access to resources. I propose that at least part of this disappointment was created or strengthened by expectations that the community fit into the category of a marginalized indigenous community. If expecting people from indigenous communities to be noble savages and poor marginalized victims, we may find it hard to accept that they act just as other human beings, sometimes in self-interest and sometimes defending idealistic values.

In the field of environmental education research, there is no doubt a need to look into themes hitherto overlooked, and to consider marginalized agents and voices. As scholars sympathetic to social justice and the situation of people in marginalized communities, we may be tempted to adapt our representations of the lived experiences of marginalization to make sure that they are (morally) recognizable in the global discourse (cf. Tsing, 2005). However, by doing this, we not only risk superficial analysis, we may also contribute to limiting the space available for navigation to people in marginalized communities, supporting structures that allow their voices to be heard only if framed in dominant categories.

Notes

[1] Pastoralism is a livelihood system based on the raising of livestock. In this article, I use the word "pastoralism" in opposition to the word "farming," the latter referring to sedentary cultivation including the cultivation of crops.

[2] The total fieldwork material consists of 100 semi-structured interviews with young men and women, teachers, community leaders, civil society representatives, and government officers; notes from five months of participant observation; tape and video recordings of events and meetings; documents (policy documents, teaching materials, census data) from government and civil society; and excerpts of conversations on social media.

[3] I am grateful to the anonymous reviewer of this paper for pointing out that these global discourses to a large degree emanate from indigenous scholars and activists, thus (my addition) representing an example of the ways in which different knowledge traditions globalize and intertwine.

[4] See, for example, van Damme & Neluvhalani (2004) for an overview of the place of indigenous knowledge in international policy documents, and the Kenyan ESD strategy (Republic of Kenya, 2008) for the national approach to the question.

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