

TEC 154 2014S, Class 32: Biopiracy (2)

Overview

- Preliminaries.
 - Admin.
 - Questions.

Preliminaries

Admin

- Today's note takers: FC and LY.
- Reminder: You should be meeting with a library lab person asap.
- Today's guest lecturer is still the legendary Monty Roper.

Upcoming EC

- Convo Wednesday: Philip Deloria, Professor of History and Native American Studies, University of Michigan.
- Sexual Assault Awareness Week activity.
- <http://www.pioneerweekend.com>

Leftovers from Last Time

- Coverage of how anthropologists of Roper's type think.
- Goals for last time
 1. What is TEK
 2. What roles does it serve?
 3. Where does it come from?
 4. Who holds the knowledge?
 5. Dangers
 6. So what?
- Reminder: Small-scale indigenous societies
 - Some of today's readings were about "India", which includes small scale societies but is also a large nuclear country.
- Roles: Ethnomedicine, management of the environment, integration.
 - Wanted to come back to this idea of integration.
 - It's integrated into the culture as a whole. Like anything in a culture it, it can't be separated out without affecting lots of other things.
 - Integrated into religion, social systems, an *entire world view*

- TEK is part of the glue that holds the society together.
- Where it comes from: From generation to generation; Natural science (observation, trial and error).
- Who holds the knowledge?
 - Not everyone shares the same knowledge. Men and women may have different knowledge. Elders may have different knowledge.
 - We also have "universal" knowledge (e.g., we can all identify a "tree")
 - Knowledge is also associated with language. "Language is an index to a group's world view."
 - Concerning as we look at language loss around the world. When you lose a word for a thing, you lose some knowledge that a thing is important.
 - Culture also holds knowledge - it is embedded in cultural practice.
 - Anthropologists say that culture is like an iceberg - There are parts that you recognize (e.g., "I'm an American, so I support freedom"), but there's a lot that's buried that you aren't aware of. When you find yourself in another culture - you may be surprised to discover how different implicit culture is.
 - Example: How close people stand to each other.
 - The same is true of TEK - much of it is implicit
 - The way you interact with the land
 - The way you plant your crops
 - You may not be aware of it, but it represents hundreds or thousands of years of adaptation.
 - This knowledge is not speciality or universal; it's not even *conscious*.
 - You can't get this knowledge by talking people - you have to go in and observe and ask questions (of yourselves and of them and ...).

Questions

- Does "TEK" stand for Traditional Ecological Knowledge or Traditional Environmental Knowledge? Either.
- Functionalism - Anthropologists look at what look like religious rituals and see if they have environmental implications (e.g., a taboo on a practice during certain times of the year might allow regeneration).
 - Might be an evolution of practice.
 - Might be based on careful knowledge turned into practice, practice regularized, underlying knowledge is lost.

Dangers to TEK

How is under threat?

- Expansion of "west". We change or challenge behaviors
 - Culture change / Acculturation
 - Inequal change - There flow of change is mostly one-directional; one group slowly assimilates another.
 - Change often leads to a loss
 - Loss of knowledge (including language)
 - Loss of practice (very few pure hunter/gatherer systems any more)

- E.g., seemingly traditional, but on phone with child who is working the city
- E.g., seemingly traditional, but with a dug well which lets them raise goats, which they can then sell at market
- The people Roper studies often want to go off to different careers (e.g., Ranchers)
- Environmental change / degradation / global warming
 - Oil drilling changes water quality and other aspects of the environment, forces people to move.
 - Large scale deforestation for things like soy plantations or cattle ranches or
 - Might help the country as a whole (more income), but bad for the environment and very bad for the indigenous people.
 - Also a loss of biodiversity.
 - Puts environmental knowledge under threat

So What? Do we care?

- Few of us live the way our ancestors lived 1000 years ago.
- Are we worse off because we can't name a few dozen trees or hunt a squirrel (at least a non-Grinnell squirrel) or ...?
- We're losing potential sources of information for things we don't understand right now. (Roper writes "Potential Cures")
- We might be losing sustainable farming practices (and other practices)
- Spiritual diversity - Loss of connection to spirit world.
- "Global knowledge commons"
 - What's in it for me? What food, medicine, etc. won't I get?
 - Broader morality of diversity. Diversity may have a value in of itself. These things have a right to exist.
 - Applied to biodiversity.
 - Could also apply to knowledge systems.
 - Biodiversity and knowledge diversity are often intricately tied together.
- Anthropologists mourn this loss because it loses a bit of our knowledge of what it means to be human.

What do we do about it? That's perhaps a bit far for us to deal with right now.

Biopiracy and Bioprospecting

- Some answers to that prior question will come up here, and we'll come back to the broader issue on Friday.
- Definitions: What do we mean by bioprospecting and biopiracy?
 - Biopiracy: Taking indigenous biological knowledge and using outside that culture, typically for monetary gain.
 - Does this prevent the original culture from using that knowledge? [Not inherent in the definition, but it's a concern about biopiracy.]
 - Doesn't that definition also include bioprospecting.
 - Biopiracy includes "without compensation or permission"

- May not include money, but taking ownership can have significant cultural implications.
- Biopiracy is not necessarily from indigenous cultures, but it's our focus today.
- "Taking without permission"
- But typically in terms of developing countries or indigenous communities (a power relationship)

Exercise

- Half the class represents an indigenous group.
- Half the class represents a business that has created a medicine from ayahuasca and are patenting it.
- First half: Why do you care?
- Second half: Why do you deserve a patent?
- Big Pharma Group: You've been accused of bioprospectpiracying. Are you guilty?
- No. We're making potentially life-saving drugs and we can impact a huge number of people.
- Indigenous people: What do you think?
- You've done this without respect. It's new knowledge to you, but it's not new.
- We will assume they are not being compensated.
- Why didn't you patent it before us?
 - Because patenting is your imperial western approach.
 - And imperialism is bad.
 - Go solve your own damn problems on your own.
- You haven't respected us! Why won't you take this a step further?
- "Respect is a moot point if you can bring it to a broader audience."

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