

Indigeneity

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“Indigeneity” often emphasizes a species’ ecological nativeness to a place. A species is indigenous or native when its presence in a region stems from natural processes and not human ones. Indigenous species are not necessarily unique, or endemic, to a particular region. Points of human influence distinguish indigenous (prior) from non-indigenous (newcomer) species (like non-native invasive species). Wild rice in the western Great Lakes region of North America, for example, has long been considered a native species whose ecological significance concerns how it contributes to supporting diverse biological communities. It is a food source for waterfowl, muskrats, and various invertebrates, and a provider of roosting, and loafing areas and brood cover for waterfowl. Human communities can reduce wild rice populations through damming waterways, mining, or importation of non-native invasive species for fishing, ornamental and other purposes. Non-native invasive species like common carp, rusty crayfish or purple loosestrife can outcompete wild rice. Changes in indigenous wild rice species, then, have consequences for the other species to which it is related (e.g. waterfowl) in the region’s ecology (Great Lakes Indian Fish and Wildlife Commission 2013; David 2008; Minnesota Department of Natural Resources 2008; University of Wisconsin Extension 2007).

The concept of indigeneity, or indigenesness, does not always exclude humans. Humans identified as indigenous often have a prior or more original claim to a place in contrast to individuals considered to be newcomers. Such claims are often expressed through place-based descriptions of relationships. Anishinaabe people in the Great Lakes region of North America, for example, have been in a relationship with wild rice, or “*manoomin*,” as it is called in the

Anishinaabe language, across many generations. Wild rice is a spiritual food (gifted by the Creator) that figures crucially in Anishinaabe origin and migration stories. Anishinaabe people consider themselves in a relationship with wild rice that have evolved together across many generations. The relationship is moral because Anishinaabe persons consider themselves to have responsibilities for taking care of wild rice habitats and honoring the plant through ceremonies; wild rice, in turn, has responsibilities to nourish and bring together human communities, among other responsibilities it may have to other species. Both humans and wild rice are ascribed forms of agency that engender mutual but differentiated responsibilities across the species (Foushee and Gurneau 2010; Great Lakes Indian Fish and Wildlife Commission 2013; LaDuke 2003; LaDuke and Carlson 2003; David 2008; Adamson 2011; Vennum 1988; Johnston 1993; Benton-Benai 1988; Andow et al. 2009).

When Anishinaabe people refer to the nativeness or indigeneity of wild rice, they are referring to it as part of an intergenerational system of their place-based relationships with the humans and non-human beings (e.g. plants and animals), entities (e.g. spirits and sacred shrines) and systems (e.g. seasonal cycles and forest landscapes) in the region. Human communities, then, are an integral part of the ecological system. Moreover, human communities via their cosmologies ascribe agencies and responsibilities to the different beings and collectives in the region. These moral relationships between, for example, humans and wild rice are both intrinsically and instrumentally valuable (Whyte 2013). They are intrinsically valuable as part of, for example, Anishinaabe identity; instrumentally valuable, (1) as sources of nutrition, (2) motivation for protecting against environmental degradation and (3) knowledge of the region's ecology. According to this understanding, indigeneity refers to systems among humans and non-humans operative in particular places over many generations.

Other conceptions of indigeneity that are ecologically relevant are, at first glance, primarily political. Indigenous peoples are defined as the pre-invasion and/or pre-colonial inhabitants of territories currently dominated by nation states like the U.S. (Anaya 2004; Sanders 1977; Weaver 2000). Many such communities exercised their own forms of governance prior to invasion and colonization and have yet to consent to the sovereignty of nation states in their territories (D.A. Turner 2006). Many indigenous peoples seek to reestablish their own forms of governance in their territories. Indigenous peoples are also characterized politically insofar as they are typically communities who share sufficiently similar experiences of colonial oppression, which range from territorial dispossession, economic marginalization, racial discrimination and cultural imperialism (Niezen 2003; Byrd and Rothberg 2011). Global political actions identified with indigenous peoples' movements have been growing stronger since the latter half of the 20th century and on through the present (Adamson 2012; Niezen 2009; Cadena and Starn 2007; Allen and Xanthaki 2011; Joffe et al. 2010). Ostensibly the movements seek to redress colonial oppressions and reestablish acceptable forms of political self-determination. Examples of these movements include global networks like the Asian Indigenous Women's Network (Declaration 2011) and the United League of Indigenous Nations (spanning North America and Oceania) (Grossman 2008), as well as organizations occurring within the United Nations (UN) like the Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues. These movements have produced multiple declarations, such as the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP, 2007) and the Mandaluyong Declaration (2011).

While this conception seems overtly political, the indigenous movement focuses considerably on ecological concerns. Indigenous peoples' political self-determination is often centered on protecting intergenerational systems of place-based relationships from being

obstructed by globalization and other political, social and economic forces. For example, Anishinaabe people have engaged in multiple political actions to protect their community rice systems from inadequate policies in states like Minnesota, risky university research programs, and impacts from mining and other industries (Adamson 2011; Andow et al. 2009; LaDuke and Carlson 2003). The government of New Zealand and the Māori people agreed to recognize the Whanganui River as a legal person, thus establishing respect for the river's rights and interests as a living whole (Postel 2012). Indigenous peoples in Ecuador played an important role in the nation state's new constitution that includes legal rights to tropical forests, islands, rivers and air (De La Cadena 2010). The United League of Indigenous Nations has a climate change working group that seeks to protect culturally significant species from alterations such as sea level rise and glacier retreat (Grossman 2008). The Asian Indigenous Women's Network works to protect the subsistence traditions of indigenous communities living in forests (Tebtebba 2011).

Indigenous peoples in Alaska have engaged in political actions to hold industries accountable for contributing to climate change that will force their communities to permanently relocate (Kronk 2012; Shearer 2011; Osofsky 2006). UNDRIP's preamble recognizes "that respect for indigenous knowledge, cultures and traditional practices contributes to sustainable and equitable development and proper management of the environment" (United Nations 2007). Indigenous groups have used other parts of UNDRIP, such as the idea of Free, Prior and Informed Consent (FPIC), as a way to protect communities from being potentially displaced or discriminated against with respect to the UN program Reducing Emissions from Deforestation and Forest Degradation (REDD+), which aims to create commercial markets for forest conservation. UNDRIP affirms the value of indigenous consent and conservation practices when there is concern that state-based policies like REDD+ will commodify forests in exploitative ways or fail

to respect the conservation practices indigenous peoples have already been doing for centuries (Alexander et al. 2011; Griffiths 2007; Corbera 2012; Van Dam 2011).

The concept of indigeneity also modifies knowledge. Indigenous knowledge(s) often refer to observations of species and the environment over a long time scale in a particular place. Indigenous peoples use this knowledge to support their subsistence. Examples range from taxonomies of local plants to knowledge of burning practices to the creation of forest islands for the production of fruit and attraction of game (N. J. Turner et al. 2011; Kimmerer and Lake 2001; Berkes et al. 2000). Though historically scientists recognized the importance of indigenous knowledges (though often without crediting indigenous peoples in ethical ways or at all), more scientists are beginning to recognize the importance of many examples of indigenous knowledges for improving research on topics ranging from the nutritional properties of plants to understanding climate induced environmental changes such as retreating sea ice (Williams and Hardison 2013; Reidlinger and Berkes 2001; Anderson et al. 2012). A host of UN documents as well as guides to scientific research include sections on indigenous knowledges or their synonyms, traditional ecological knowledge and native science (Nakashima et al. 2012; Berkes 1993). Unfortunately, the guiding assumption is often that what makes knowledge indigenous is its being a collection of related observations over a long scale of time in a particular place. Yet many indigenous community members, scientists and scholars contend that indigenous knowledges must include “knowledges of” one’s responsibilities to the human, non-human beings and entities, and systems that make up the places where one works, lives and plays (Reo and Whyte 2012; McGregor 2008; Pierotti and Wildcat 2000; Kimmerer 2002; LaDuke 1994). It is the knowledge of how one is situated as an agent in relation to other beings, entities and systems that exercise different and similar forms of agency. Indigenous knowledge refers to a

person's actual participation in that system. Collective observations over time are just one component.

The concept of indigeneity, then, can refer to the aboriginality of many possible individuals or groupings, from particular species to governments to knowledges. It is important to recognize that indigeneity is seldom used to express "coming before" in a basic sense; rather, it is more often used to express intergenerational systems of responsibilities that connect humans, non-human animals and plants, sacred entities, and systems.

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