

APPROPRIATION, APPRECIATION, ACCOMMODATION: INDIGENOUS WISDOMS AND KNOWLEDGES IN HIGHER EDUCATION

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Abstract – This paper focuses on differences between the underlying principles of Western science and the knowledges and wisdoms of Indigenous peoples in such places as Australia, Southeast Asia, Africa, and Central and South America. It notes changing phases in the approaches to Indigenous Wisdoms and knowledges, and highlights the shifts from appropriation to appreciation and then accommodation. Nevertheless, major tensions remain, both within and between Western science and Indigenous knowledges and appreciations. This creates challenges for institutions of higher education, as well as for other bodies.

Zusammenfassung – Dieser Artikel konzentriert sich auf die Unterschiede zwischen den grundlegenden Prinzipien westlicher Wissenschaft und dem Wissen und der Weisheit einheimischer Völker in Regionen wie Australien, Südostasien, Afrika und Zentral- und Südamerika. Er zeigt wechselnde Phasen in den Ansätzen zu einheimischen Formen von Weisheit und Wissen und beleuchtet den Wandel vom Kontakt über die Wertschätzung bis hin zur Akzeptanz. Trotzdem bleiben sowohl innerhalb als auch zwischen westlicher Wissenschaft und einheimischem Wissen erhebliche Spannungen bestehen. Das schafft Herausforderungen für Institutionen der höheren Bildung sowie für andere Einrichtungen.

Résumé – L'auteur de cet article se penche sur les différences entre les principes fondamentaux d'un côté des sciences occidentales, de l'autre du savoir et de la sagesse chez les peuples autochtones, tels ceux d'Australie, d'Asie du Sud-Est, d'Afrique et d'Amérique centrale et du Sud. Il décrit les phases successives qu'ont traversées les diverses approches des formes autochtones de savoir et de sagesse et en explicite l'évolution, à partir de l'appropriation vers la valorisation puis l'accommodation. Des tensions majeures demeurent cependant, tant au sein des sciences occidentales et des connaissances autochtones qu'entre elles, et ces tensions représentent un défi pour les institutions d'enseignement supérieur et pour d'autres organismes.

Resumen – Las diferencias existentes entre los principios básicos de la ciencia occidental y los conocimientos y la sabiduría de los pueblos indígenas de diferentes regiones del mundo, tales como Australia, el Sudeste Asiático, África, América Central y América del Sur, son el tema central de este artículo. El autor nota un cambio en la aproximación a las formas indígenas de sabiduría y conocimientos y realiza los pasos que van de la apropiación y la apreciación hasta la adaptación. No obstante, entre la ciencia occidental y los conocimientos indígenas prevalecen grandes tensiones. Esto supone un reto importante para los institutos de educación superior, al igual que para otras entidades.



Резюме – В данной статье акцент ставится на различии между принципами, лежащими в основе западной науки, и знаниями и мудростью местного населения в таких регионах, как Австралия, Юго-Восточная Азия, Африка, Центральная и Южная Америка. В статье обозначаются изменяющиеся этапы в подходе к местным формам народной мудрости и знаний, а также переходы от процесса их усвоения и понимания и далее к их адаптации. Тем не менее, остаются основные спорные вопросы как внутри, так и между западной наукой и местными формами передачи знаний, что, безусловно, призывает к действию высшие учебные заведения, а также и другие учреждения.

Despite growing support for the principles and practice of equal opportunity and multiculturalism, and the growing appreciation and apparent accommodation of Indigenous knowledges in Western institutions, higher education is still dominated by a Western worldview that appropriates the views of other cultures. To thrive in the tertiary environment, Indigenous peoples, as with others from more holistic/contextual cultures, have little choice but to participate in research and teaching programs that either devalue or do not recognise their cultural identities.

For some, knowledge has a scientifically established basis, whereas with wisdoms this link cannot be clearly established. The underlying assumption is that Western science is the objective measure of what is factual. Unless it can be proven through these scientific methods, it is not “science”; and no matter how efficacious a process it is for those that use it, it is relegated to the realm of wisdom. However, given that basis of Western science is coming under increasing criticism, its use as a tool for establishing the factual may be little more than a cultural idiosyncrasy. Thus this paper makes no such distinctions between knowledge and wisdom.

After centuries of exploitation, Indigenous peoples have moved in a few decades from being objects of Western scientific investigation to becoming scientific investigators themselves. This is problematic in that, to be accommodated within the scientific community, many of us are now continuing a process of appropriation that has had a devastating impact upon our communities in the past and is still a force in our lives today. The irony is not lost on this researcher. I am aware that I am choosing to object to this process, that I am sustained by the system that is its cause, and that the ideas presented here become cultural objects, subject also to appropriation.

Appropriation

The appropriation experienced by Indigenous peoples largely occurs in two forms – the plundering of resources and knowledges. These are considered here in turn.

Resources

Indigenous people's early experiences with Western cultures were ones of exploitation where the natural resources were appropriated to fuel the economic growth of the Western world. The appropriation was of physical resources – metals, gems, herbs, spices, animals and land for agriculture and settlement. That which had economic value was plundered to the extent that few communities were able to enjoy the quality of life they had experienced before Western contact. As a result many communities can no longer sustain their former lifestyles and are now impoverished either in their original homelands or, in many cases, the areas to which they were removed to facilitate their exploitation (Rigney 2001).

These are not practices of the past: they continue unabated in many areas of the world today. In Papua New Guinea, Indonesia, the Philippines, parts of Africa and Central and South America, Indigenous peoples' resources are being exploited and their land devastated. The laws that allow this process were put in place by colonising powers who did not recognise Indigenous sovereignty over land and resources. These laws allow little legal recourse when resources are exploited to the extent that the former lifestyles of Indigenous peoples can no longer be sustained. The benefits of colonial and postcolonial economies, which replaced the economic systems of "colonised" peoples, serve only to oppress Indigenous peoples. Indigenous peoples are forced to the margins of Western economies where they experience poor health, education, housing and employment outcomes and frequently higher incarceration rates (Angus and Lea 1998; Deeble et al. 1998).

Knowledges

Occurring simultaneously with this process has been the appropriation of wisdoms and knowledges in the uses of medicinal herbs, hunting animals, and obtaining of "local knowledge" of edible plants and animals to allow survival in environments alien to Western understanding (Rigney 2001). That which could be categorised and understood within the Western ontological and epistemological system was readily appropriated. Indigenous scientific knowledges have been and continue to be plundered. Some of the principles of aerodynamics were derived from the boomerang, and many of today's medical breakthroughs are based on Indigenous scientific expertise in the use of plants and animals. Yet the encompassing body of knowledge which contained this science, some with traditions of tens of thousands of years of practice, has been widely rejected or devalued as little more than witchcraft or sorcery (Morgan 1999).

It is seldom acknowledged that the survival of Western peoples and their economies would not have been possible without the knowledges of Indigenous peoples. At the time of "colonisation", many Indigenous peoples had better health and quality of life, and lived longer than their Western coun-