



POLIS Project on Ecological Governance

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**Biodiversity and Traditional
Knowledge:**
*from biopiracy
to biocultural ethics*

Kelly Bannister

**POLIS Project at the Centre for Global
Studies**



University
of Victoria

CFGS -
POLIS



Presentation in an nutshell

- Focus: biological diversity & traditional knowledge
 - Global concerns about “bioprospecting”
 - Impacts on the discipline of ethnobiology
 - Influence on contemporary research ethics theory, policy and practice
- Informing our understandings of how to treat one another across diverse social, cultural, economic, political and geographic “borders”.



Western drug hunters are swarming over the globe
hoping to gain wisdom from non-Western healers
and medicines from non-Western plants.

SECRETS OF THE SHAMANS

By Mary Roach

PHOTOGRAPHS BY PHILI-LORCA BICORCIA

No one comes to Olosega, Samoa, for a vacation. The island is a thin two miles wide, with no hotels or restaurants. The village store stocks six varieties of tinned corn beef and scant else. To get from the airstrip, either you walk or make arrangements with the local school bus driver. It's classic Third world tropics: the rain comes in torrents; the shower, in trickles. ■ Few white folks come to Olosega at all. This morning's flight, however, brings a motley six-pack: Brigham Young University Paul Cox,

Biodiversity prospecting (Reid et al 1993)

“the exploration of biodiversity for commercially valuable genetic resources and biochemicals.”

Biopiracy (Pat Mooney, ETC Group)

“the appropriation of the knowledge and genetic resources of farming and indigenous communities by individuals or institutions seeking exclusive monopoly control (usually patents or plant breeders' rights) over these resources and knowledge.”



“Whatever the will and wishes of those involved, there is no ‘bioprospecting’. There is only biopiracy.”

Pat Mooney (2000: 37) “Why We Call It Biopiracy” in H. Svarstad and S. Dhillon (eds), *Bioprospecting: From Biodiversity in the South to Medicines in the North*.



“Most of the harm in the world is done by good people, and not by accident, lapse, or omission. It is the result of their deliberate actions, long persevered in, which they hold to be motivated by high ideals toward virtuous ends.”



Isabel Paterson (1943: 235)
The God of the Machine



Key Issues

- Justice/fairness
- Permission/consent
- Access
- Control
- Ownership/rights to cultural and intellectual property
- Cultural responsibilities
- Accuracy/due credit
- Equity/reciprocity
- Benefits (tangible/intangible) from use
- Prevention of harms from misuse



Responses

Political activism

- e.g., media, political pressure

Legal (Western, Indigenous)

- e.g., IPR regime, customary law

Policy (international, domestic, local)

- e.g., Nagoya Protocol on ABS (2010)

Ethical guidance (local to international)

- e.g., Ethical codes

→ → Biocultural ethics



Biocultural Ethics

(Relational ethics, ecological ethics, global ethics, Indigenous ethics)

“Biocultural ethics [involves] recovering the vital links between biological and cultural diversity, between the habits and the habitats of the inhabitants. These links are acknowledged by early Western philosophy, Amerindian traditional ecological knowledge, and contemporary ecological and evolutionary sciences, but have been lost in prevailing modern ethics.”

Ricardo Rozzi (2012). “Biocultural Ethics”
Environmental Ethics 34 (1): 27-34.



Biocultural Ethics

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Past contributions by POLIS:

- Clayoquot community code of conduct for researchers (2003, 2005)
- CIHR guidelines for Aboriginal health research (2007)
- Tri-Council Policy Statement 2nd Ed, Ch. 9 (2011)
- Int Soc. of Ethnobiology Code of Ethics (2006)
- Domestic policy advice under CBD (8j and ABS)



Biocultural Ethics

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Current work at CFGS-POLIS:

- Ethics Program – Int. Society of Ethnobiology
 - Code of Ethics review and revisions for 2014
 - Online Ethics Toolkit ethicstoolkit.net
- Intellectual Property Issues in Cultural Heritage
 - SSHRC-MCRI funded project based at SFU
 - www.sfu.ca/ipinch/



While nature has no bounds, how do we deal with the governance issues that do?

