

April 21, 2005

20: CULTURE, APPROPRIATIONS, HERITAGE, “SELLING CULTURE”

Read: Nagel: Red Power: Reforging Identity and Culture: 158-178, Renewing Culture and Community: 187-205

I. Introduction

A. In the readings so far we've seen many examples of a resurgence of interest in one's own culture, in particular of minority groups

1. Leading to cultural recovery projects—restoration, etc.
2. We've seen that such projects are often controversial, contested
3. Let's explore why

II. Why were efforts successful and not before?

A. Spaces opened up

1. In mainstream society—attitudes, in legislation by the state, etc.

B. Obviously very different from earlier situation during colonial and “nation-building” eras in Europe, US and Canada

1. Earlier in the U.S. and elsewhere: assimilation and eradication projects in 18th, 19th and earlier 20th century (e.g., in U.S., termination)
2. Example: painting of “American Progress”¹
 - a. John Gast painting, 1872: “at a glance the grand drama of Progress in the civilization, settlement and history of our own happy land.”
 - b. Shows Indians (and bears) fleeing the (young and female) Spirit of Progress
3. Indian images have always permeated U.S. national identity²
 - a. One of the earliest symbols of American Revolution, the Boston Tea Party

¹ In Robert F. Berkhofer, Jr., 1978. *The White Man's Indian: Images of the American Indian from Columbus to the Present*. New York: Vintage: plate 8.

² See Philip Deloria, 1998. *Playing Indian*. New Haven: Yale University Press.

- 1) Men dressed as Indians dumped tea into the harbor, protesting British taxation
- b. But these are symbols: the actual people were going to disappear
- c. The same occurred in Latin American countries: earlier civilizations (Aztec, Maya, Inca) provided an image of a glorious non-European past
 - 1) But the citizens were to be mestizo Spanish-speaking citizens, an amalgamation of indigenous and European—“*la raza cósmica*” (the cosmic race)
 - 2) Indigenous societies were going to assimilate or otherwise disappear

III. Multiculturalism

- A. How culture should be defined clearly matters when we want to examine cultural recovery, heritage recovery projects
 1. In anthropology the notion of culture highly contested at present
 2. You see confirmation of this in many of our readings
 - a. Nagel, Handler, Warren and Jackson
- B. The culture concept is debated in anthropology just at the time that indigenous groups (and other ethnonational movements) are vigorously reappropriating it
 1. Spaces have opened up for projects to recover culture—multiculturalist values in ascendance
 2. In the vast majority of W. Hemisphere countries
 - a. Indian symbols, ancient Indians, and flesh-and-blood Indians are now seen as vital elements in nation-building
 3. And native Hawaiians
 4. Now there is **symbolic capital** (non-material value) in indigenesness
 5. In what domains?
 - a. Tourism

- b. Spirituality (“White shamans and Plastic Medicine Men”—the video we will see on Thurs.)
- c. The notion that a nation rich in cultural diversity (Canada, U.S.) is a privileged nation
- d. **Discuss:** other domains?

IV. Problems encountered in cultural recovery projects:

- A. What groups are entitled? How are they defined?
 - 1. How is their membership decided?
- B. Again, what is definition of culture?
 - 1. What is traditional culture?
 - a. The Handler essay
 - 2. How do we understand culture change?
- C. Issues of power
 - 1. Who owns culture?
 - a. Handler’s Quebec example of a piece of legislation turning a vibrant neighborhood into a museum
 - 2. Who decides which goals are acceptable?
 - a. Nationalist goals
 - 1) Example of Norway in 19th century
 - 2) Similarities with Quebec?
 - 3) Handler: “Thus the nation and its members ‘have’ a culture, the existence of which both follows from and proves the existence of the nation itself”
 - 3. Who are the authorities that decide the “legitimacy” or “illegitimacy” of a group’s claims?
 - a. Often they are government institutions: for example, the Bureau of Indian Affairs in this country

- 1) Example of the Soviet Union's Saxon recovery project
 - a) Anthropologists in Moscow were seen to be the "experts" on Saxon culture; were authorized to judge whether a given community was really Saxon and so could receive funds for cultural and language recovery
- 2) Also the civil courts
- b. Or institutions that are specifically dedicated to cultural recovery
 - 1) Possible problems are illustrated by Handler's Quebec example
- c. Vine Deloria's complaint about Ethnic and Indian Studies departments in universities (in Nagel):

Ethnic Studies programs were never able to distinguish between the culture in local communities and the[ir] political identity...minority groups became consumers of their own culture, which they objectified, and this consumption was understood as a political act that affirmed a nationalistic identity.

- d. Nagel's point about reservation Indians' disagreements with urban ones
 - 1) "They come and do a few dances, say 'it's cool,' and leave"

D. Goals

1. The "selling culture" problem
 - a. Southwest art in US
 - 1) Much greater value if artist is "certified" Native American
 - 2) It's the federal government that certifies
2. Tourism
3. When cultural difference is affirmed in a way that can be interpreted as "strategic essentialism" there are problems

- a. Promoting, claiming, defining culture seen as a strategy to achieve various aims
 - 1) Open a casino
 - b. Nagel provides examples
 - c. Anthropologist Alan Hanson wrote an article on a Maori (natives of New Zealand) exhibit that contained, he said, “hybrids”
 - 1) Firestorm resulted
 - 2) He was seen as debunking Maori claims about who they are
- E. We must always ask, when evaluating such projects, who loses out?
- 1. Anastasia Karakasidou’s example of Balkan-speaking communities in Greek Macedonia³
 - a. Her analysis flew in the face of Greece’s need to see itself as a Greek nation
 - b. Needed to assert that all Greeks (citizens) are/must be Greeks (the Greek nation)
 - c. The Greek nationalist project had led to severe repression of these people (Balkan speakers living in Greek territory)
 - 1) Forbidden to speak their language—fines, thrown in jail
 - d. Her careful documentation of this repression resulted in death threats, denunciations by government agencies
 - e. Cambridge University Press withdrew its publishing contract for the book—too controversial (“fearing for the safety of its staff in Greece”)
 - f. This was a scandal, an academic boycott of the Press resulted
 - 2. Language standardization results in some languages, some dialects losing out
 - a. Maya language standardization in Guatemala: a big problem

³ Anastasia Karakasidou, 1997. *Fields of Wheat, Hills of Blood: Passages to Nationhood in Greek Macedonia, 1870-1990*. Chicago: U Chicago Press.

V. Anthropologist's role?

- A. Most anthropologists want to help in mobilizations when earlier histories of oppression and exploitation, broken treaties, etc., are clear
1. Sometimes the moral status of nationalist movements aren't very clear-cut
 2. Croatia was suppressed by Serbs in the 1990s
 - a. But Croatia has a terrible history of alliance with fascists, participation in repression of Jews, leftists during World War II that no one has forgotten
- B. Indigenous communities in W. Hemisphere usually are seen to clearly need help, to deserve sympathy
1. Because of widely-held values against forced assimilation, etc.
 2. Liberal Enlightenment values concerned with social justice, self-determination—all men are created equal
 3. And progressive values that reject exploitation in the form of enclave economies, internal colonialism ("the fourth world")
- C. Cultural recovery projects in indigenous communities are seen to help achieve other goals consistent with the above values:
1. Take their destinies into their own hands
 2. Become more autonomous
 3. Fight for and win freedoms of association and expression
 4. Rights to land, water, timber, mineral, and other resources
 5. Dignity
 6. In US and Canada point #4 is well established (although there are lots of suits about boundaries, treaties, etc.)
 - a. In Latin America this point is not at all well established in a number of countries

VI. Anthropological issues

- A. Unlike many sites in the Old World, there's no dispute that Indians are autochthonous, indigenous, aboriginals
 - 1. Present-day ones are unproblematically seen as descended from pre-contact inhabitants
 - 2. What else makes Indians a distinct people, indigenous in cultural terms?
 - a. And, again, who decides when there's a dispute?
- B. The government is often the one to decide
 - 1. In the US: "scheduled tribes" (Nagel)
 - 2. In Colombia, the government uses the criteria of culture and location (recognized indigenous community)
 - a. For example, the government has argued that you lose your Indianness once you leave your community
 - b. A Colombian court once argued that the very fact that a group of Indians hired a lawyer and went to court with its grievance was proof enough that they were no longer Indian.⁴
- C. The national indigenous organization, ONIC, has devised a trait list derived from anthropology
 - 1. But the danger with this set of criteria is that Indians will be seen as "no longer indigenous" once they are not characterized by these traits
 - 2. Note that there are always political interests in these definitions
 - 3. As we see in Nagel's discussion of the U.S. census
- D. Research on indigenous organizing for cultural recovery has examined the following issues
 - 1. As with all institutions, potential problems that can arise include:
 - a. Disagreements over goals
 - b. Internal political problems (struggles for power, etc.)
 - c. Corrupt or co-opted leaders

⁴ See Christian Gros, 1991. *Colombia Indígena: Identidad Cultural y Cambio Social*. Bogota: Cerec: 206-211.

- d. Institutional self-protection (e.g., by the indigenous organizations) might result in decisions not in their constituency's best interests
 - e. Rise of elites who no longer identify with, or work for, constituencies
2. Additional ones unique to Indian organizing
- a. Indians themselves "selling" culture
 - 1) Commercial sweat lodges, etc. (pass out material) denounced by other Indians
 - a) Will be covered in "White Shamans and Plastic..."
 - b. What kind of model of organization should be adopted?
 - 1) Western? Indigenous? Blend?
 - 2) The organization has to have some Western characteristics because it has to interact with Western institutions (government, media)
 - c. Cultural difference and authenticity are such a significant a part of the movement
 - 1) How do you confirm it?
 - a) Assert it? Perform it?
 - 2) Nagel points out that urban Indians are more likely to organize
 - 3) But are the least likely to have traditional claims to leadership, to know language, to know the reservation's problems
 - d. Lack of experience

VII. Colombian case

- A. Spaces opened up in Colombia for indigenous mobilizing in 1960s, 1970s
 - 1. Indians had been organizing to fight for land since at least the 1920s
 - 2. As happened in the U.S. earlier, notion of a pluralistic society emerged

3. Earlier: the unquestioned goal of the nation was to turn everyone into Spanish-speaking, Catholic, hard-working *Colombian* citizens
 - a. The usual images of Indians—savage, superstitious, dirty, ignorant
 - b. Indians themselves would say they didn't want to be "indios"
- B. The Vaupés (Tukanoans)
1. Complicated mosaic of various change agents
 2. An illustration of the politics of culture recovery
 3. CRIVA: the regional indigenous organization
 - a. Mistrusted by communities
 - b. It hadn't come to power through grass-roots organizing
 - c. Seen as artificial
 - d. Strong ties to Catholic mission which wanted to keep it weak
 - e. Funding—corruption
 - f. General complaints about graft, vote-buying, clientalism, alcohol abuse
 4. ONIC, the national indigenous organization, sees CRIVA to be too involved with its own politics⁵
 - a. CRIVA leaders are often seen to over-identify with Bogotá, with Western values, concerns, and mentalities
 5. Traditionally Tukanoans have distrusted mobilizing of any kind
 - a. Only in times of war was there any organizing beyond the local settlement (a communal longhouse)
 6. Furthermore, CRIVA leaders are young men, not elders
 - a. These young men are seen as challenging traditional authority patterns

⁵ See ONIC, 1998. *Memorias: Los Pueblos Indígenas de Colombia, un Reto Hacia el Nuevo Milenio*. Bogotá: Ministerio de Agricultura: 250-251.

- b. In general there's ambivalence, if not distrust, of people who act superior
- 7. CRIVA's structure is based on Western bureaucratic model
- 8. CRIVA's stated goal is a unified Vaupés
 - a. Communities are suspicious of this idea
 - b. Mistrust of any group that claims to represent the entire region
 - c. CRIVA's leaders come from a small area, and represent only 3 language groups—not representative of the entire region's sixteen language groups
 - d. When leaders travel around the region, members of the communities say CRIVA officials do the talking
 - e. And they don't travel much—nightmare topography of tropical forest and rapids-filled rivers
- 9. Also there are struggles between CRIVA and subregional organizations—rivalry
 - a. CRIVA doesn't want them to get funds directly from funders
- 10. None of these problems is really wholly the fault of these individuals
 - a. It's always very important to understand the context in which the organization is embedded
- 11. A particular critique of mine was how CRIVA publications represented Vaupés social structure
 - a. It denied the reality they themselves lived
 - b. Of linguistic exogamy
- 12. CRIVA's publications misrepresented the kinship/marriage/linguistic system because this institution didn't fit with received wisdom about Indians
 - a. They had been advised, and had come to want to portray Tukanoans in romanticized, idealized terms comprehensible to outsiders

13. And to speak of “moving towards unity”
 - a. And of ending the divisions separating the language groups
 - b. And of the goal of reuniting “like brothers”
 - c. Denying the linchpin of all Vaupés social structure
 - 1) In patrilineal societies, the “unite like brothers” doesn’t work
 - 2) You would end up marrying your “brother” or “sister”
 - 3) A sharp distinction between “me/members of my descent group” and “you/group we get our spouses from” is built into the system
 14. I don’t have a problem with culture change—if the communities were changing, if they wanted to change, well and good
 - a. But this was not the case here
 - b. The communities themselves were not giving up the institution, were not denying they believed in and practiced their kinship/marriage/linguistic system
 - c. On the contrary, Tukanoans were worried about it breaking down, were taking steps to see it didn’t
 15. I concluded these activists were not acting in their constituency’s best interests
 16. No matter what their motives, they were participating in a discourse used by the Catholic missionaries earlier in the 20th century
 - a. Who tried to discredit, deny and do away with Tukanoan models
 - b. They burned longhouses, destroyed sacred ritual paraphernalia, etc.
 17. CRIVA had an interest in representing the Vaupés in a certain way
 18. So, should I be loyal to CRIVA or to the various communities I visited?
- C. Questions one can ask an anthropologist about studying indigenous mobilizing in the Vaupés:

1. What's the best position to take to help local communities?
2. How best to help Indian organizations, when requested, understand costs and benefits of proposed development projects?
3. How best to analyze, write about, and interact with local indigenous organizations when they don't see eye to eye with the communities they represent?
4. Who constitutes a concerned anthropologist's constituency? The organizations, or the communities?