

Grounds for argument: local understandings, science, and global processes in special forest products harvesting

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INTRODUCTION: WHERE ARE THE PICKERS?

In the Pacific Northwest and elsewhere, growing concerns about human impacts on forests and other natural systems, the possibilities for sustainable development of local communities, and the tradeoffs involved in tighter linkages with global market forces have come together in exciting ways in the special forest products (SFP) arena. This seminar series comes at an important time in the development of thinking about these issues.

Since other social scientists in this seminar series (economists Mater and Blatner, and fellow anthropologist Clay) have focused almost exclusively on economic and business aspects, in this paper we have chosen to range more widely than we might have liked. Consequently, we take as our task here to sandwich the ways we typically discuss these issues, both by contextualizing (what are the larger institutional and global contexts in which SFP harvesting occurs?) and by grounding the discussion (what is harvesting actually like as an activity?).

I have had the privilege of carrying out research on SFP harvesters over the past 6 years in Peru with Brazil nut harvesters¹ and in the Pacific Northwest with brush and mushroom pickers. The road has been filled with many surprises and perplexing features, some of which I want to share with you this afternoon. In both cases harvesters work long, hard hours, they are economically and/or socially marginalized, their rights to nontimber forest resources are threatened, and the forest itself is under assault from agricultural, mining, logging, and other interests in the name of “development.”

In Washington, in the Olympic Peninsula (WA) Man and the Biosphere Project (MAB), we set out with a relatively modest goal: to develop a socio-economic profile of who was harvesting edible wild mushrooms in the Biosphere Reserve. The mycoflora here is exceptionally diverse because of the large amount of downed woody material, high humidity, and incredible microclimatic diversity of the Peninsula. We have found three types of harvesters: commercial, recreational, and subsistence, representing four

principal ethnic categories: Cambodian (and other Southeast Asian), Hispanic, Native American, and Caucasian (or Euro-American). Picking is almost entirely confined to the fall season and focuses on chanterelles (*Cantharellus* spp.), along with matsutakes (*Tricholoma magnivelare*), boletes (*Boletus* spp.), and several other species. Since the harvest is seasonal, all pickers must rely on other sources of income to sustain their households through the rest of the year. Each ethnic group has devised a strategy, a seasonal round as it were, though there is much individual variation within the ethnic categories. We describe more fully the social organization of this harvesting later in the paper.

This paper starts with a deceptively simple question: where are the pickers? This question calls for more than just fieldwork; it is useful to turn the gaze on ourselves for a moment. Why is it that we almost never see SFP harvesters themselves at SFP workshops, seminars, etc.? Why do the policy and research communities know so little about the people doing the actual harvesting work? Social scientists working in SFP harvesting and ethnobotany in both temperate and tropical ecosystems report that local harvesters typically have an intimate knowledge of flora and species relationships. So why aren't the often sophisticated understandings and concerns of harvesters taken seriously in the formulation of SFP policies? Given how commonplace harvesting of a wide array of forest resources is among peoples around the world, why is it so new and surprising to think that many people in our region make a living by harvesting forest resources other than trees? Or to turn this around, why has one necessary but destructive use of our forestlands—large-scale logging—assumed such primacy in our thinking, to the exclusion of other ways to use forest resources?

WHAT HAS ANTHROPOLOGY GOT TO DO WITH IT?

While interest in other peoples' customs and strange ways is as old as humanity itself, the attempt to systematically order all this information is quite recent, only a hundred years old or so, and until very recently largely confined to Europe and North America. Anthropology, especially cultural anthropology, is concerned with the nature of culture—shared mental states (attitudes, values, beliefs, etc.)—and how these cultural patterns are distributed among humanity.

We now realize that this task of organizing different peoples' worldviews, customs, and practices cannot be separated from the western Enlightenment rationalist worldview of the 500-year-old Euro-American expansion and domination of the modern world system (Wolf 1982). As the French anthropologist Levi Strauss put it, anthropology is bourgeois Europe "scratching itself on the head," wondering who all these other people were that they encountered in their expansion over the globe.

Anthropology constitutes a principal point in which Others' understandings enter Enlightenment rationalist discourse, or what we may call the scientific worldview that dominates western culture. Anthropology serves as an especially visible arena in which to see these contending worldviews ("discourses") play out. All victors rewrite history in their own light and attempt to subordinate other cultures' understandings ("local narratives or discourses") to their dominant one ("the grand narrative of scientific

discourse”). (Think back to Foster’s presentation and the ways “ethnobotany” transforms folkloric and Native American herbal knowledge into scientific knowledge.) In addition to providing an opening for local understandings to enter the discussion, anthropology also provides an arena in which the dominance of local by grand worldviews has been more easily contested. This is because anthropology is also about valuing other cultures, other ways of knowing, other ways of being human.

Oddly, then, anthropologists operate as culture brokers, mediating among dissimilar worldviews, translating other cultures’ understandings. This is an awkward position, since in many ways it would be far better to have the “others” themselves expressing their viewpoints. But they usually don’t, or more typically can’t, for reasons of power or language (so anthropologists continue to have a niche in the job market!). Anthropologists typically find themselves in the middle, between cultures, and have learned to incorporate some level of reflexivity into their work. Or, more simply, they have learned to expose their biases through turning the focus on themselves.

GLOBAL PROCESSES AND LOCAL EFFECTS

Before launching into an interim report on the very interesting findings in our current MAB research, we must briefly assess the forces operating at a global level that impinge on Olympic Peninsula harvesters, for the contending discourses noted above are necessarily linked to political economic arrangements that underlie and support them.

In addition to mediating between cultures, anthropology—borrowing from a much broader social science tradition involving many disciplines—focuses attention on the nature of the modern world system and how large-scale forces affect everyday lives. After all, behind such abstractions as “SFP harvesters” or “hegemonic worldviews” are real living, breathing human beings. Our task is to make linkages among macro- and micro-level processes and their effects on real peoples’ lives.

World system theory argues fundamentally that the modern world system, with its origins in European expansion overseas beginning around 1500, is different from all preceding large political-economic systems. In all previous systems, the scale of political organization matched the scale of economic organization; in other words, economies

were command economies of some sort. The functioning of the economy of the modern world system, in contrast, must lie outside the control of a single political entity (Wallerstein 1979). Capital must be able to freely roam the Earth searching for profit. A great global division of labor has been created, linking yet pitting core and periphery.



Harvesters

Startling advances in all areas of material functioning have resulted, from transportation and communication to food production and energy consumption. But these advances, nice as they are, come at some cost in social upheaval, as labor is shunted around to be combined with capital and resources in a factory system. The growth in the world economy has been accompanied by—or for some analysts has required—the dislocation from their land of small-scale societies of food foragers, horticulturists, or pastoralists. Witness the opening up of the vast grasslands of the American midwest, which required the great Indian wars of the last century to remove and relocate the Native peoples living there.

As noted above, anthropology crystallized as an intellectual tradition or, better, quasi-scientific discourse, around Europeans' and North Americans' attempts to make sense of, control, and if necessary remove the various peoples they encountered in their global expansion. Of course, dislocation of conquered peoples by expanding states or empires is hardly a European or American invention. However, the special nature of the modern world system—relatively unfettered accumulation, reliance on wage labor, finance capital seeking maximum returns on investment, political apparati in place to stabilize and facilitate that accumulation—makes the dislocation both more widespread and more profound.²

Nash (1994), however, argues that it is not only in the periphery of the modern world system that such dislocations are taking place. They are also occurring in the interstices of the core of this modern world system. In the current economic restructuring and flight of capital offshore, factories close or move and employment opportunities become increasingly precarious and volatile. In the timber industry, for example, reorganization and automation have had profound effects, especially on small mill towns, throughout our region.

SFP harvesting must be located within these wider processes. Such activity represents both marginal people thrown onto a subsistence base, in whole or in part, and an opportunity created by that same system to broaden occupational niches. Ironically, these hidden forest workers are more closely tied to global markets than most other sectors in the Pacific Northwest economy, given how predominantly the wild mushroom industry is tied to export markets in Japan and western Europe.

UNDERSTANDING THE CURRENT CRISIS

It is fundamental, therefore, that we locate SFP issues in these larger contexts—not only political and economic, but also social, cultural, and historical—in which they occur. In this section we focus on 1) the institutional crisis in which both public forest-managing agencies and, to a certain extent, corporate timber companies find themselves, and 2) the even larger cultural crisis of our North Atlantic civilization.

Richard White (1992) notes that “Gradually, over the last 30 years, what might be called the master narrative of the national forests has changed. In the original story there was once a vast and bountiful nature. Americans exploited this bounty to build a civilization, but abundance bred waste and carelessness. Far-sighted men, recognizing that the resources were not

unlimited, wisely saved a remnant of the original abundance by withdrawing it from the public domain. Carefully nurtured, these lands have yielded profusely as skilled managers have made sure that what is taken is replenished. [He notes that] recent studies of the national forests have not been kind to this narrative.”

Given the resource destruction occurring around the turn of the century, there were good reasons why this consensus chartering the public forestlands system was constructed. The paradigm shift in the U.S. Forest Service from this earlier “custodial” approach to the post-World War II “conspiracy of optimism” involved in the multiple-use paradigm has been well documented (Hirt 1994). But as the 20th century closes, the multiple-use consensus is under attack from several directions. White (1992) and Martinez (in this series) argue that Native Americans’ understandings and practices, only sometimes coded legally in treaty rights, have virtually never been taken into account. From another angle, Wayne Hage (1994) challenges the legal authority of Federal agencies to manage their lands in the first place, by arguing that public lands of the west are in fact a “split estate”—prior private rights of early white settlers exist legally and in practice. Recent acrimony over ancient forests, centered in the Pacific Northwest, clearly contests the privileging of certain narrow interests over larger public values (Norse 1990). Other criticisms of this paradigm come even from employees within Federal agencies, most notably the U.S. Forest Service (Brown and Harris 1992). As social scientists within forestry circles have been arguing, alternative values are demanding recognition and crashing in on the forestry profession and management agencies (Clark et al. 1993).

What underlies this volley of new claims on public forestlands is the growing public suspicion that multiple-use rhetoric disguises industry predominance in the management policies and practices on public forestlands. “For, whatever else they were, national forests were an exercise in power. The changes in the land marked the changes in power [referring to pushing Indians off public forestlands]” (White 1992).

This current legitimacy crisis of public agencies (USFS, BLM, etc., and other timberland managers) is, in turn, located in a broader paradigmatic shift, or discursive break, thought to be currently underway in our civilization. West (1993), for example, notes that the present crisis “is primarily rooted in the modernist promotion of what Lewis Mumford called ‘the myth of the machine.’ This myth is not simply an isolated aesthetic ideology but rather a pervasive sociocultural phenomenon that promotes expert scientific knowledge and elaborate bureaucratic structures that facilitate the five P’s power, productivity for profit, political control, and publicity.” Many scholars argue that our civilization is now entering a “post-modern” phase, characterized fundamentally by widespread lack of belief in any such overarching, generalizing stories about why the world is like it is.³

The consensus described by West was crafted in the Cold War struggle between superpowers. It privileged a technocratic scientific discourse of rational experts and spawned an entire university research establishment tied to it in many ways. It came at the expense or exclusion of alternative or local knowledge, not only internationally but also within our own country.

Minority understandings were subordinated, or silenced, in the “war effort” of the whole national modernist project . . . much as Japanese Americans were silenced and shipped off to remote camps in the name of defeating fascism during World War II. Such alternative understandings of the situation, their values, their version of events, their narrative, weren’t necessarily destroyed, but rather subordinated to a larger, hegemonic discourse.

When the conditions underlying or propping up a particular dominant worldview change, the worldview itself must change. A “discursive break,” or a space, is opened in which subordinate or alternative narratives, or understandings, can emerge into public conversation.⁴ With the fall of the Soviet Union and the end of the Cold War, we now appear to be at such a point in our civilization; a deep sense that “something is changing” pervades all aspects of our lives.

Many things are in flux right now, as we are between convincing narratives about how the world works, between paradigms or what Shumway (1991) has called “guiding fictions.” What exactly we call them doesn’t much matter rather, we should grasp the idea that some convincing worldview must necessarily emerge for any society to hang together and work for its members.⁵



Dynamic forest floor

SPECIAL FOREST PRODUCTS: CONFLICTING WORLDVIEWS

So why have these alternative claims to proper use of forestlands emerged into public discourse now? As the larger civilizational worldview in which they are nested changes, the legitimacy of narratives (such as the one described by White), of practices (such as massive clearcutting of our forests), and of institutions based on them (such as the U.S. Forest Service) is now more contested and open to question.

It is in this milieu of many sectors claiming recognition for their uses of forestlands that SFP practices have emerged and come into public view. And it is in this context that the forestry research and policy community is belatedly coming to recognize that a whole lot of SFP harvesting has been going on in our region for quite some time.

The legitimacy crisis I described above is also being felt by academics in the forest research community, most of whom remain wedded to scientific positivism and the multiple-use forestry paradigm described by White (McEvoy 1992). Without romanticizing or privileging them, we are coming to understand that pickers and buyers—those most engaged in SFP activity—know more about SFP than most of us in the research community.⁶

Our basic argument today is this: we cannot understand or develop comprehensive policy on SFP without the direct participation of harvesters in the reconfiguration of forest policy and without taking into account their understandings and practices. Let me be clear: to advocate this is not to be



Pickup load of morels for sale

anti-science or to engage in some romantic advocacy. Without harvesters' participation we will have poorer science, poorer management models, and unenforceable policy. But we have an opportunity now, at this historical juncture, to change the way we do research and formulate policy, to engage all users of our forestlands, and to truly move toward cooperative management of forest ecosystems.

Now to be fair, part of the reason SFP harvesters' understandings and practices have been absent from these discussions is the difficulty of finding and engaging them.

Mushrooming and other SFP collecting takes place in relative obscurity and remoteness deep in the forests and mountains of our region, and some harvesters are trying to lie low and keep the activity hidden for legal, tax, and other reasons. Also, secrecy is a necessary strategy for defending access to the resource, whether such access is formally legal or not.

But while policymakers with mandates to generate revenue from forest activities conveniently envision fantastic wealth earned in a black market economy, we encounter SFP harvesters driving aging vehicles, living in trailers or very basic housing (if not out of their cars), and wearing worn out clothes. (Have you ever worn sneakers with holes in the soles while carrying heavy buckets of wet mushrooms on steeply pitched slopes?) Buyers' homes are not palaces painted with gold, either. A few have moderate two-bedroom ranch homes, but everyone is living quite basically in economically depressed areas.

Cambodians are frequently seen driving newer vehicles, such as nice 4X4 pickups. But this is yet another example of the well known migrant strategy of extended families investing together in reliable transportation, rather than in shelter. Most Cambodians we have encountered live in low-income apartments or trailer courts. There are advantages to appearing successful in public as well. People who are perceived to have wealth are perceived to have power and are less likely to be taken advantage of. Also, it casts an image of "we're the real mushroom pickers," impressing other harvesters as well as buyers.

The downside is that Cambodians are outsiders who are carving a successful economic niche and displacing local traditions. They are a magnet for rumor mongering, which is a subtle but powerful form of social control. Negative images of "Asians" (Cambodians and other Southeast Asians) abound among the pickers we encounter, especially among Caucasians. Despite their frequent claims of not being prejudiced, there is clearly an anti-immigrant undercurrent present.

Buyers often report that local harvesters are "not as good" as the Cambodians. From an economic standpoint this may be true, but it ignores other motivations Caucasians or others may have for harvesting. Frequently we are told by whites that their main purpose for picking mushrooms is that it gives them an excuse to be out in the woods. The possibility of making money makes it even more exciting, plus every mushroomer dreams of turning the

corner and hitting the mother lode. One picker told us, for example, “Sometimes I come into a patch and I can’t see where it ends, my heart starts racing and I let out a whoop. If they’re big I yell ‘walruses’ so my partner will get a good laugh and feel the same excitement.”

The crucial point is that local cultural attitudes and values are too easily overlooked or ignored. SFP harvesters are all too often regarded as “problems” to be managed rather than as actors in their own right.

It is interesting in this context to note the lack of a public mushroom harvester identity. Throughout the Olympic Peninsula, stores and taverns have signs saying “Hunters Welcome,” but nowhere do we see “Mushroom Gatherers Welcome.” Signs frequently adorn homes with “This family supported by timber dollars” or “This family supports timber workers,” but nowhere do we see “This family is supported by SFP dollars” or “This family supports SFP workers,” despite the fact that, as Keith Blatner (earlier in this seminar series) and others have shown, it is a multimillion dollar industry and employs thousands of people.

This lack of social identity raises numerous questions we are only beginning to understand in our fieldwork. In the recent years of timber/environmental battles that have raged on the Olympic Peninsula, the consequence has been a much reduced timber harvest and timber employment. However, given the long history of timber identity on the Peninsula, many former workers still describe themselves as loggers, and boys wear Logger World suspenders, trying to be optimistic about their future in timber. The reality, of course, is that along with a decrease in timber harvesting, automation is reducing employment. Many, it seems, are supplementing their incomes with SFP, but SFP gathering does not call to mind the powerful masculine image of logging and hunting; you don’t hear talk about the “big mushroom fallers” or brushpickers of yesteryear. Except in the case of perhaps a very few dedicated individuals, SFP harvesting pays far less and is much more labor intensive than logging. In this atmosphere, if you were an oldtimer getting out in the woods to pick mushrooms, you wouldn’t want to call yourself a mushroom picker.

As I was saying, one of the difficulties of research on SFP harvesting is that it’s hard to find the harvesters. Even when you do encounter them, usually at buying stations, they often show an initial reluctance to open up. Many harvesters definitely resist SFP research if they know it has to do with regulation. Several times we have heard people mutter, “Oh no, another research project.”

We recently came across a situation in which mushroom research plots were set up right in the middle of one of the best picking grounds in the area, and a large buffer area around them was closed off to harvesting. At least eight local pickers have told us they were so upset at being imposed on without being consulted that they have gone into the plots and picked mushrooms. Their activity, however illegal, irrational, or irresponsible, must be seen as part of an “everyday resistance” (Scott 1985) of the implicit arrogance of the scientific research paradigm, the dominant worldview of the powerful institutions of society I discussed above.

Recently the USFS Soleduc Ranger District has started issuing \$120 season permits for commercial mushroom harvesting. This continues a process of fulfilling their mandate and managerial duties. It follows the Western scientific pattern of isolating from complex ecosystem processes specific, individual parts to be monitored and regulated. The commercialization of mushrooms prompted local managers to implement policy, as they did with hunting, fishing, etc. But in the process they disregarded local tradition; as a result many of Forks' schoolkids, elderly, and housewives were turned into outlaws. People there are adamant about resisting the permit process; they refuse to buy or can't afford permits, but continue to harvest their patches. The stepped-up monitoring and regulating has the unfortunate and perhaps unintended effect of criminalizing culturally and economically valuable activities.

Harvesters well understand that research and regulation go hand in hand. Even if permits are free, there is still a sense of losing control. All this is part of a deeper suspicion, we believe, of academics, especially "scientists," in producing information. Harvesters understand that information is not neutral and objective. However unfortunate, this sort of anti-intellectualism is based on a realization that knowledge and power have gone together and have rarely benefited them.

Scientific research is basically about control. Access to wild resources connotes a certain freedom from control; indeed, the "wild" nature of special forest products refers precisely to their being "unsubdued" or "out of control." That's also part of the allure about this activity; it seems to point back to a frontier narrative we once shared and still tell about, a closeness to a raw and untamed land. But why can't SFP practices point forward to a new narrative of sustainability?

Yet, however difficult the research, very real problems result when local understandings are dismissed or not taken into account. This is particularly true in the SFP arena, where harvesters are in some ways ahead of the research community in understanding the biology and ecology of the plants, along with the organization of picking, grading, preparing, and marketing them.

So for a variety of reasons, the lack of engagement of SFP harvesters and buyers with the forest research and policy communities has meant that harvesters' views are not feeding into the formulation of SFP policy. Consequently, SFP policies are being developed that are not only out of step with harvesters' practices and understandings, but are also unenforceable.

THE MAB SFP PROJECT

The Man and the Biosphere Special Forest Products (MAB SFP) project is focused on chanterelle mushroom harvesting in the Olympic Biosphere Reserve of northwest Washington. It is one of a handful of research projects designed to be interdisciplinary from the outset to the final reporting of research results. We are trying something seldom attempted—to discern the intricate workings of a big activity across biological, socioeconomic, and managerial disciplines. The project is policy-relevant, designed to yield information to resource managers, public and private, around the Peninsula.

We are mandated and have tried to be as public and inclusive as possible. Some preliminary comparative work has been started in the Southern Appalachian Biosphere Reserve, but much more work will be needed there.

As we noted earlier, there are three “types” of harvesting of edible wild mushrooms: commercial, recreational, and subsistence. Each of these is a “tradition” worth knowing, that is, a set of practices handed down from generation to generation, with a history. Our task has been to describe these traditions by creating a social profile of each.⁷

It is very important to realize that there is no single portrait of a mushroom picker, even within each of the three categories of commercial, recreational, and subsistence use. On the northwest side of the Peninsula (Forks area), for example, there is a long tradition among local Caucasians of going out to gather wild foods as a subsistence strategy, whereas on the southeast side (Shelton area) such a local culture of wild gathering is much less evident. Though mushrooms are present on the dry rainshadow northeast side of the Peninsula (Quilcene), there appears to be less harvesting of all sorts, although recreational picking appears to be relatively more important. On the southwest side (Quinalt area) there is a mix of ethnic groups and commercial activity that is still unclear.

What follows is a preliminary report, given that we are still in the middle of fieldwork and many patterns are not yet clear.

A) Commercial Harvesters

Why has commercial mushroom harvesting intensified so in the last decade? Implicit in our argument is that this increase has to do with national and even global economic restructuring, further analysis of which is beyond the scope of this paper.

While commercial harvesting of SFP, in this case chanterelle mushrooms, appears on the surface to be a relatively uniform activity, in fact we see two different movements: a phase in the maintenance or upward mobility of recently arrived immigrant groups—Southeast Asians (since the late 1970’s) and Hispanics (since the late 1980’s)—and downward mobility for local Caucasians thrown onto a “subsistence” base in declining mill towns.

Ethnicity plays a very important role in SFP harvesting on the Olympic Peninsula. For example, it appears that among all ethnic categories, it is largely Caucasians (and perhaps some Native Americans) who frame their plight in ethnic terms. Split labor market theory⁸ would predict that those experiencing downward socioeconomic mobility, or who face the threat of it, should be the most active in defending their rights and privileges. An anti-immigrant, quasi-racist rhetoric could be a useful weapon. In contrast, Cambodians and Hispanics collecting SFP on the Olympic Peninsula are not downwardly mobile, and they seem less overt and, oddly enough, less “ethnic” about their claims to resources.



Mushroom plot posting

It appears that very few of the people harvesting mushrooms on the Olympic Peninsula come with a strong cultural tradition of mushrooming. All are operating in the relatively unregulated atmosphere in which mushrooming takes place; as immigrants with weaker language and cultural skills, Cambodians and Hispanics are particularly attracted to the unregulated nature of this business. You don't have to speak English or deal with foreign customs in order to make a living. With acculturation, later generations of Cambodians and Hispanics will probably drift out of this sector.

Ethnic strategies differ somewhat between and within categories:

1) Southeast Asian (Cambodian) - Several categories of Southeast Asians, including Cambodians (majority group plus a Muslim minority group), Vietnamese, Laotians, and some others, have been involved in SFP—particularly mushroom collecting—since the late 1970's. Their dominant position in regional commercial mushrooming seems connected to their arrival in the United States at about the time the mushroom industry began to take off.

Cambodians seem to specialize within mushrooming, according to both Cambodian and non-Cambodian sources. In Crescent, Oregon, R. McLain (pers. comm.) found that Cambodian groups divided the work into recognized roles: someone to scout out the location of matsutakes, someone to pick, someone to cook, someone to track market prices and sell the pooled mushrooms. Separate receipts were kept for each person's contribution of picked mushrooms, and people serving the group in these special roles were paid. This sort of organization seems distinctive to the Cambodians, and represents a group adaptation quite unlike that found in other ethnic groups.

Oddly enough, as the most entrepreneurial of commercial pickers, Cambodians more closely embody the "American" work ideal than any of the other groups.

2) Hispanic - Growing Hispanic involvement in SFP harvesting cannot be understood apart from the economic and political crises in Mexico and Central America that send increasing numbers of people northward. SFP represent another commodity in a menu of commodities for Hispanics harvesting in the western States. For example, along with R. Hansis (pers. comm.), we have discovered that some Hispanics will abruptly depart from picking huckleberries or harvesting brush to work in the apple and pear orchards of Yakima and Hood River, despite the fact that the wild products are still in fine, harvestable condition. They shift like this to preserve their seniority in economic niches they have long dominated.

Hispanics on the Olympic Peninsula are recently arrived (they have been involved only since the late 1980's), and they are internally divided into various sub-categories, including: country of origin (Guatemalans perceive themselves as very different from most Mexicans, for example), class/occupation (those who reside more or less permanently on the Peninsula vs. those who move in seasonally, typically in the fall to work Christmas trees), or subethnicity (many Mexicans pride themselves on Indian heritage; others emphasize mestizo traits).

In any case, mushroom harvesting for Hispanics is opportunistic and ancillary to “brush” picking (salal (*Gaultheria shallon*), huckleberry (*Vaccinium* spp.), and other floral greens). Since brush can be harvested almost year round, Hispanics in SFP devote their energies to it. Mushrooms are too ephemeral, seasonal, and volatile in price to be counted on as an income source. There may be other constraints as well, however; brush sheds hiring teams of workers may not want their workers picking mushrooms, since that would divert attention from the products needed by the business. In at least one case, it appears that Mexicans are clearly told not to pick mushrooms, and that if they get caught they will be dismissed. However, a larger brush shed told us they know their pickers go after mushrooms, but they don’t care since it is more important that their subleasers form a commitment to the sections the shed has leased from a local timber company. Such commitment to their lease areas results in a quasi-stewardship system. Subsidized by mushroom income, the shed’s brush pickers can afford to stay on.

3) Native Americans - So far, we are finding little evidence of Native American involvement in Olympic Peninsula mushrooming. This is rather surprising, since some groups (e.g., Quinalts) have a relatively secure, if fragmented, resource base that allows tribal members to exclude competitors and harvest SFP. Native Americans, like Caucasians, operate as individuals when it comes to mushrooming.

Various ethnographies of Olympic Peninsula native groups (summarized in Suttles (1987)) make no mention of use of mushrooms by any of the Olympic Peninsula groups—Makah, Southwest Coastal Salish (including Quinalt), Quileute, Central Coast Salish, or Southern Coast Salish (Puget Sound area). Since gathering was done traditionally by women, and women’s activities have typically been underreported and marginalized, it could very well be that there was or is a tradition of women’s gathering of mushrooms for subsistence, medicinal, and/or shamanic use. Native Americans have a long experience of being objectified by anthropologists and others and are especially reluctant to divulge intellectual property information.

There is growing tension between Native Americans and others over access to SFP on tribal lands. Because reservation lands were allotted earlier this century, reservations are a patchwork quilt of different and multiple owners. Consequently, enforcing SFP picking regulations is very difficult. For example, with such fragmentation and a permeable reservation boundary, it has been easier for the Quinalt Tribe simply to prohibit SFP collecting by nontribal members anywhere on the reservation than to establish and enforce a permit system allowing SFP harvesting on some sections.

4) Caucasians (Euro-Americans) - Wild mushroom harvesting by whites is several generations deep, especially on the northwest side of the Peninsula. In some cases, mushrooms are a subsistence item, an important part of the pantry. In other cases, harvesting is a hand-me-down tradition from father to daughter to brother and so on. Within this tradition there are practical benefits to the community, such as giving teenage boys a constructive activity and promoting their appreciation of the local environment, or giving retired loggers a continued link to the woods they love. It has partially to do with how nature is perceived; for a hiker or recreational picker, the forest is a place

to visit; for a logger or commercial mushroom picker, the woods are where they live—a place for giving, taking, and nurturing.

It is unclear how much of Caucasians' SFP orientation is a result of borrowing from nearby Native Americans, a legacy of gathering traditions from the Ozarks and southern Appalachians where many whites originated (with possible ties to Native traditions there), or an independent invention to buffer the seasonality of logging and mill employment. In any case, many Caucasians involved in commercial mushrooming on the Peninsula are suffering downward mobility, often related to the shrinking of employment opportunities in logging, millwork, and related occupations.

Caucasians have been in the business the longest, and have the best knowledge of local patches. They defend "their" patches, even though many are on public or timber company land. They resent outsiders of any sort disturbing their "traditional" activities—whether other ethnic groups getting involved in commercial harvesting, or regulators telling them where they can or can't pick. The ethic of independence, freedom, and defiance of authority is strongest here.

5) Other: There have been or are Russians, Japanese, and others engaged from time to time in SFP collecting on the Olympic Peninsula.

B) Recreational Harvesters

Urban recreational mushroom pickers are now being surveyed. Preliminary indications suggest that only some are organized into mycological associations and mushroom clubs. Recreational picking on the Olympic Peninsula seems to be declining, according to our preliminary discussions, because of the increasing maze of regulations and increasing competition from commercial pickers. Many people say that because it's so hard to find mushrooms in such a wet, dense forested area, they'd rather pick in the Cascades or east of the mountains.

Adopting the environmentalist rhetoric of fighting "overharvesting" of mushrooms, some recreational pickers have been instrumental in pushing for a series of laws and regulatory machinery to monitor and control commercial harvesting. Whether intentional or not, underlying this rhetoric and these policies is a certain attack on the class base of commercial pickers, threatening their livelihood. This is especially odd since studies show (e.g., Norvelle 1990), and commercial harvesters constantly claim, that there isn't an overharvesting problem. Nevertheless, it remains unclear what the long-term effects of intensive harvesting may be. Also, what constitutes "overharvesting" is both a perceptual and a research question. Recreational pickers, especially those organized into mycological societies, act as amateur scientists and tend to buy into the dominant scientific, rationalist worldview discussed above.⁹

C) Subsistence Harvesters

This is an undertheorized category. By subsistence we refer to those harvesters who "need" to incorporate some part of what they pick into their household subsistence strategy through direct consumption of what is picked. Most harvesters falling into the other two categories will keep some

mushrooms for personal consumption, but it seems largely in the local Caucasian category in the Forks area that people commonly pick for household consumption. Surprisingly, preliminary information suggests that few Native Americans on the Peninsula pick mushrooms for household consumption.

CONCLUSIONS

Along with policymakers, researchers and scientists need to draw SFP harvesters into ongoing, sustained conversations about management issues. SFP harvesters are co-actors in the regional drama playing out before our eyes. In the absence of good information, we in the research and policy communities have made them into whatever we need them to be—exploited workers, noble forest-dwellers, clever entrepreneurs, or bandits. We must be more sensitive to specific socioeconomic patterns—all SFP harvesters and harvesting are not the same (e.g., Forks vs. Shelton). It should be noted that, as co-actors in this drama, they in turn make us into whatever they need us to be.

From an economic standpoint, it is fundamental for policymakers to understand who the harvesters are. Though stories of wealth and violence may be an excuse or concern that initiates and drives policy, the industry may be fragile in light of the global mushroom industry. If local regulations become too restrictive, many commercial pickers dependent on an economic niche will leave the region and become either circuit pickers or commuter pickers. Buyers complain that they go through periods with mushrooms but no pickers. Thus in nonpeak times, local part-timers may be the only ones to pick up the slack when the pros are chasing hot spots or less regulated areas, or (like many Hispanics) are away harvesting other commodities. The important point is that not only are many mushroom pickers quite able and willing to be mobile, but so is the industry. Companies and buyers usually talk prices every day, and if a company can buy cheaper mushrooms of the same or better quality elsewhere, that is where they shift their emphasis.

This raises important questions about what kind of mushroom industry would provide the most benefit and be most stable for regional economies. One possibility being tried is promoting local stewardship over the resources and keeping the product within the Olympic Peninsula until it can be processed and value added. (Jim Freed discussed some of these possibilities last week.) Such a system would be much less susceptible to the roller coaster, cutthroat world of the global fresh market, which pits harvesters in economies with a lower standard of living (eastern Europe, Russian Far East, Chile, India, etc.) against harvesters in the Pacific Northwest. The long-lived and flourishing floral greens industry has cut down on bulk shipping and started processing raw ingredients into value added products, which are then put on the market. Evidence is emerging that the wild mushroom industry is following the same pattern, from drying and packaging to preparation of pastes and powders.

SFP harvesters on the Olympic Peninsula speak ambivalently about widespread clearcutting, on both public and private forestland, as the biggest threat to their resource base. On the one hand, pickers, especially Caucasians, do not question the right of timber companies to do what they

want with their own trees (hegemonic discourse). Yet when their favorite stand is cut, they see their favorite patches destroyed, at least for the next 15-40 years. The proportion of forestland on the Peninsula with stands 40-60 years old is increasing, so the longer-run prospects for chanterelle mushrooming appear to be good. The question is whether pickers will have access to these new areas coming into production.

The implications for land management are enormous and difficult. New models of local stewardship that reap the advantages but avoid the problems of the commons are clearly needed (McCay and Acheson 1987). In other cultures with long traditions of local land stewardship, self-interested invasion of the commons is kept in check through social controls and ties. SFP harvesters represent groups of people intimately working in the forest extracting renewable resources, whose social networks might effectively control resource erosion and thievery. Bringing them into the policy conversation is essential to improve practices and promote community sustainability.

We have a special moment in history to influence the nature of the new consensus that will certainly emerge out of the current contested period. This task is inherently interdisciplinary and political. Consideration of the value of SFP and SFP harvesters must be built into the curricula of forestry schools as we train a new generation of foresters, who must be sensitive to and knowledgeable about both the larger contexts and the range of local uses of the forest.

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ENDNOTES

¹ My work with Brazil nut collectors in Peru has been with a local conservation group (Asociación de Conservación para la Selva Sur) and an international affiliate (Friends of the Peruvian Rainforest), on which I serve as a board member (Love 1989, Ricalde 1993). (“I” throughout refers to Love, who delivered the talk.) Co-author Eric Jones has done important ethnographic fieldwork on wild mushrooming both on the Olympic Peninsula and in the Oregon Cascades.

² This is hardly the place to embark on a social history of the modern world system and the place of scientific ways of knowing in it. Wolf (1982) is a good place to begin and to find further references.

- ³ For many postmodernists, the modern rationalist worldview is an especially generalizing metanarrative, but is simply one of a variety of ways, or epistemologies, by which humans make assertions or truth claims about phenomena. Bases for such assertions vary in different cultures, ranging from empiricist or logico-deductive to authority, intuition, or revelation. That we privilege science (empirical and logico-deductive ways of knowing) in our “western” tradition has to do with politics, not truthfulness in this view. Best and Wellner (1991) review currents in post-modern thought.
- ⁴ In this sense, there is nothing “post” about postmodernism: rather it is the latest or current version of anti-modernism, which has cropped up at every discursive break of the last few centuries. (I am grateful to Henry Rutz, Hamilton College, for this insight.)
- ⁵ Eventually a new consensus is reached, though careerists in the cottage industry of postmodernism mimic their modernist counterparts such as Fukuyama in advancing the idea that history, at least “ordinary” history, has stopped, in a sense; that postindustrial, electronic society is in a new, permanent postmodern phase of development (Callinicos 1990).
- ⁶ Additionally, science as we practice it has been influenced by the mycophobia of Anglo culture, so that mushrooming in particular has not been recognized either as a worthwhile activity or as an activity much worth knowing about (Arora 1990).
- ⁷ A parallel concern is why some of these alternative understandings and uses of forest resources are called “traditional,” while others aren’t. To be labeled “traditional” becomes a valuable asset in defending rights to resources, one of which many Native American groups are rightly masters. But why, for example, is current commercial harvesting of mushrooms by Hispanics and Southeast Asians not “traditional?” How have these different “traditions” been constructed? Who uses the terms “local” and/or “traditional” to describe these people? They themselves do, as a weapon in defense of a way of life; recreational pickers also do, to distinguish them from educated, urban types like themselves. Identities are both constructed and imposed.
- ⁸ In SFP we see the operation of a split labor market (Bonacich 1972). In a perfectly competitive market there would be no barriers to entry in any occupation, and wages would reflect the danger or difficulty of the work. The most difficult and dangerous occupations should be the highest paid, so as to attract workers to them. The split labor market model holds that higher wage workers are better organized and create barriers to entry to protect benefits and better working conditions from these market forces. Difficult, dirty work typically is performed by minorities, who are distinguished by ethnic identifiers with which they come to identify.

⁹ McLain (pers. comm.) has noted that recreational pickers go on “forays,” which originally connoted going out into enemy territory to pillage or take. While mushroom forays are not so violent, the term captures very well the estrangement from and longing for connection with nature that urbanites’ recreational picking of mushrooms provides. Our point here is not to side with one or the other, but to expose the class nature of the two camps and the ironic contradiction (for some) of hard-working immigrants pulling themselves up by the bootstraps vs. anti-immigrant rhetoric. Many non-SFP-harvester Caucasians in the Shelton area object to raids that expel undocumented Hispanic workers, without payment of wages for work performed. Such crackdowns regularly take place during the fall.

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