

An Indigenous Perspective on Infectious Disease

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ENVIRON 244: Translating the Great Lakes
Winter 2020

Anishinaabe Aki



Aki: “Earth” in English, sacredness of space

What does this mean?

- Embodiment of all lifeforms, living and nonliving
- Reciprocity between lifeforms and mutual responsibility
- Nothing is considered non-native since fluidity exists between all lifeforms
- **A focus on connectedness and responsibility!**

Invasive Species

<https://link.springer.com/article/10.1007/s11625-018-0571-4>

<https://umich.instructure.com/courses/357876/files/folder/readings?preview=13968444>

According to Aki: **Plants are nations, not species.**

Reo and Ogden:

- Plants are able to migrate
- Non-nativeness does not exist!
Invasive species are not inherently “invasive”.
- Mobility is not good or bad, even though their effects on ecological systems may be.

Geniusz:

- Nature is communal and mutualistic
- In order for us to survive and migrate, **we need to depend on each other**

Invasive Species

<https://link.springer.com/article/10.1007/s11625-018-0571-4>

We need to understand our interactions with other lifeforms.



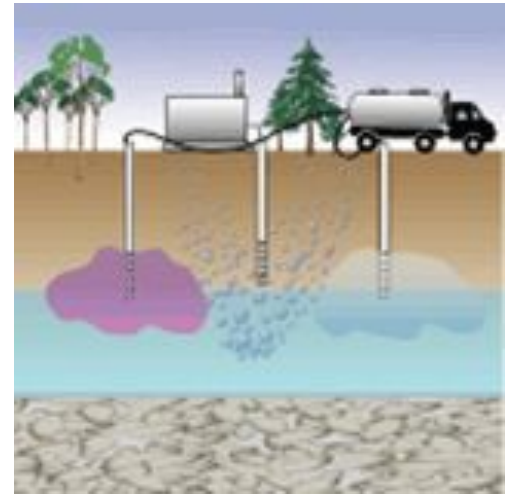
- Zebra mussels came to the Great lakes via ballast water
- Failure to understand relationships between them and other aquatic life has resulted in toxic algal blooms
- Anishinaabe are not in favor of invasive species, but understanding relationships is fundamental in order to have balance

Invasive Species

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Invasive species provide an alternative to our current ecological system.

- Nature finds its own balance and that new species will find their own niche within an ecological network.
- Western approaches to land and invasive species management intervene with the natural process and disrupt nature's equilibrium.



Invasive Species & Infectious Disease

- Anishinaabe are not in favor of invasive species, but understanding relationships is fundamental in order achieve balance in the ecosystem
- We don't fully understand our relationships to viruses
 - First step is to look for patterns in our behavior
- We have to learn how to adapt with viruses, instead of preventing them
 - Difficult to prevent viruses with our interdependency on animals and global transportation methods
- We must let nature find balance once disease has spread
- More infectious disease is an index of climate change
- Viruses are an effect of how we live in the world and are a threat to our way life

Pandemics & COVID-19



Where do we see aki currently?

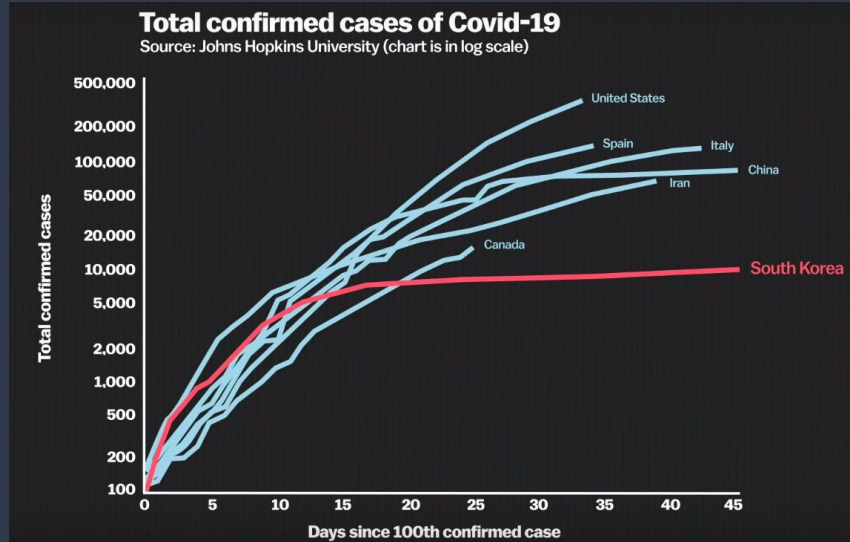
- Pandemics are a result of our failure to recognize aki and take care of it
- Self-isolation is a communal phenomenon with mutualistic benefits
- We have to act as a country, rather than as individuals, to succeed in “flattening the curve”
- There is a need to understand our relationships with others to understand the trajectory of the disease
- Aki looks different in every culture!

United States



- Western sense of individualism
- Panic buying → supply issues (PPE, basic necessities)
 - Putting individual need first
- Poor communities are suffering the most
 - “3-4x more likely in black counties”
- Lack of collective response from the government
 - Political divisions interrupt this
 - Action not taken early enough
- The silver lining: collective action by community and non-profit organizations

South Korea



- Eastern sense of **collectivism**
- Level 3 threat in early February, along with Italy and China
 - Largest outside China at the time
- Understood pattern of infection from 2015 MERS outbreak and SARS outbreaks in other countries
 - Need for testing early-on
- Strong efforts to understand virus' path of migration through severe contract tracing methods
 - Mapping people's movements
- Government aid to everyone, including non-Korean travelers

Concluding thoughts:

- We need to recognize aki and take care of it
- We cannot prevent pandemics from occurring, and they are likely to occur again in the future
- What we CAN control:
 - Learning from this pandemic and how we approach future situations
 - Implementing policies with mutualistic benefits → understanding others
 - Whether or not everyone is protected and how we protect others