

K.S. RAJAN'S *BIOCAPITAL* (2006)

TERMS/CONCEPTS/TOPICS*

1. Biocapital
2. upstream / downstream; biotech value chain
3. strategic decommodification
4. institutionalized bioethics
5. Biopolitics
6. corporate regimes of governance

** This list is a subset of the one on the handout*

“BIOCAPITAL”

CULT. TRANSFORM. IN MATERIALITY/EXCHANGEABILITY OF “LIFE”

Transformation created by “variable use of market commodification versus public commons”

Disciplined by “new forms of capitalist logic”:

≠ logic of industrial capitalism

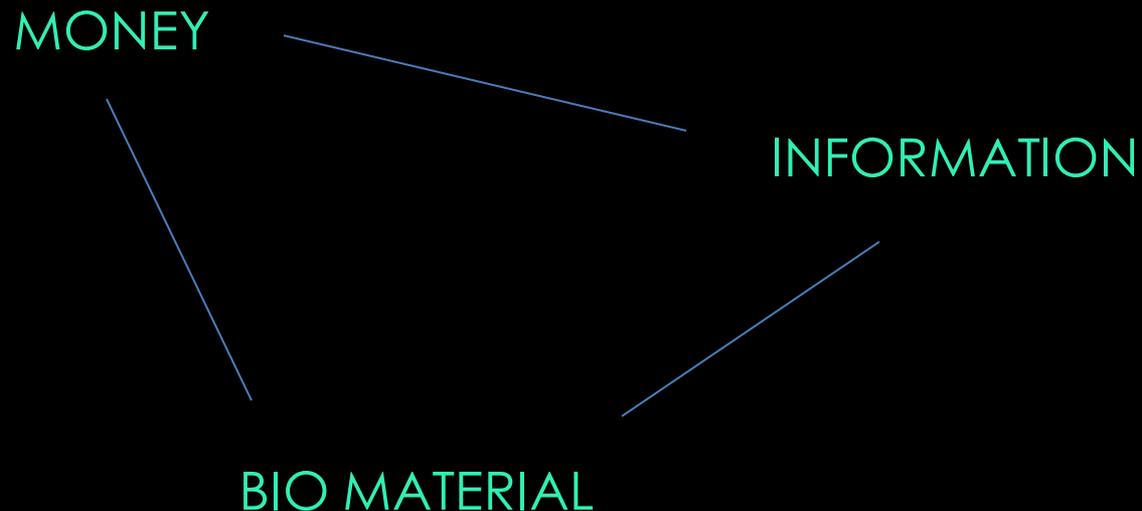
≠ logic of PoMo information capitalism

eg. SNP Consortium, Rep-X, Indian State cases...

Concerns “how ‘life’ gets redefined through contradictory processes of commodification” (47)

ANALYZING BIOCAPITAL

multiple forms of currency...



“The creation of value... is a consequence of both circuits of exchange and of strategic articulations of concerned individual and institutional actors” (43)

UPSTREAM - DOWNSTREAM

GENOMICS Co.

patent/sell genetic info

new

small

fast

data intensive

PHARMACEUTICAL Co.

develop/sell drugs

old

big

slow

capital intensive

“Positioning” within the biotech “terrain” influences interests, such as whether and what information you want to be “free” /public or owned and private, etc.

“public/private debates overcoded with corporate fights”

BIOTECH MARKET DYNAMICS

A STRUCTURAL PROBLEM

“The very *nature* of drug development makes it that much harder to alter the fundamental power relations between small and big companies” (46)

SNP CONSORTIUM

EXAMPLE OF “NEW CORPORATE ACTIVISM” / BIOCAPITALISM

SNP Consortium = “strategic political act by pharmaceutical companies that provides these companies with both material and symbolic capital while always already appearing to be disingenuous commitments to the public domain and to the progress of science” (52)

- ✓ cannot be read simply as shrewd strategic act
- ✓ it is also sincere corporate gifting
- ✓ increases monopoly of Big Pharma
- ✓ oppose owning DNA info BUT support owning biologicals

DECOMMODIFICATION

STRATEGIC OWNERSHIP / DECOMMODIFICATION

“What is at stake is the rendering of the ‘raw material’ of production [SNPs] ‘public’ ... in order to give later ownership advantage to those who control the modes of production [downstream / Big Phrama]” (54)

1. SNP Consortium case suggests *natural* state of genomic info is as commodity
2. Thus, the act of decommodification / “gifting” can be framed as virtuous/altruistic

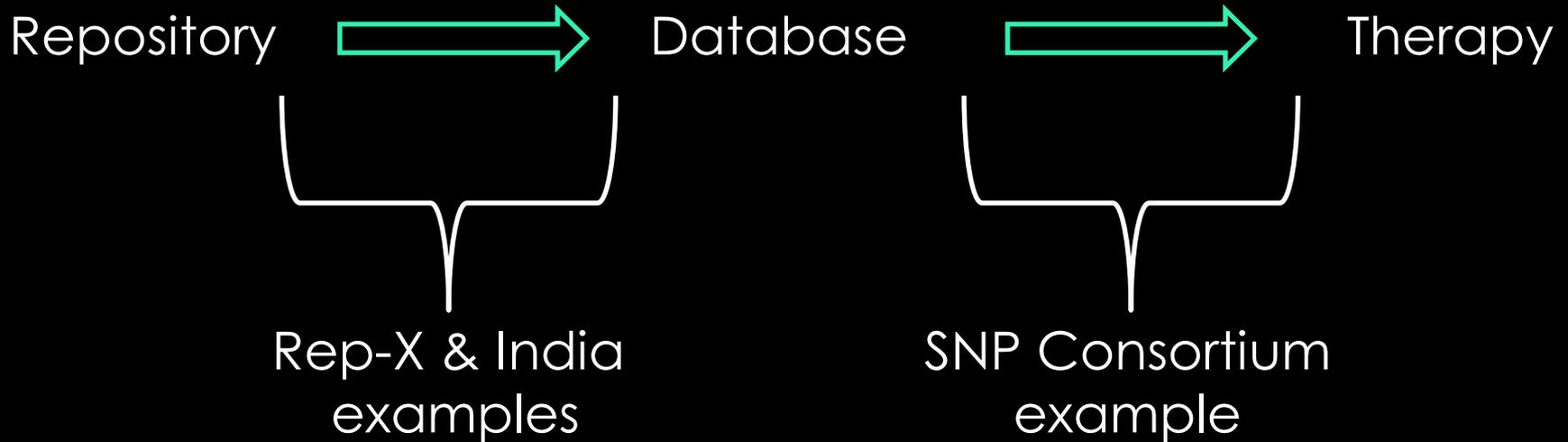
“MARKET LOGIC[S]” OF BIOCAPITAL

“The crucial point is that both the perpetuation of ownership and its obstruction can be argued as being “sound market logic”: in the former case, ownership is the reward that functions as incentive to innovation, whereas in the latter the regulation of ownership (or its strategic elimination, as in the case of the SNP Consortium) allows maximally efficient and rapid circulation (which itself can be an incentive). Clearly, therefore, the contestation here is over the very definition of what constitutes market logic, the outcome of which has considerable implications for the overall terrain of cooperation, conflict, and value generation.” (58)

BIOTECH "VALUE CHAIN"

UPSTREAM

DOWNSTREAM



THE DREAM OF ALL FIRMS? DO ALL THREE :

1. collect DNA, 2. generate valuable info, 3. dev. drugs

INSTITUTIONALIZED BIOETHICS

REP-X AND BIOETHICISTS'S MEDIATION

“The universalizing tendencies of institutionalized bioethics are not just consequent to a spatial uncoupling of ethical adjudication from the context of the emergence of an ethical dilemma. They are also consequent to the fixing of “the ethical” as somehow an eternally valid adjudication - as, in fact, a statement of a moral position.” (65)

MICHAEL FORTUN'S MORAL VS. ETHICAL DISTINCTION

ethics “emerge from an encounter”; not principles of right and wrong / “moral adjudication”

BIOCAPITALISM & GLOBALIZATION

REP-X VS. INDIA'S CBT

1. Most samples collected from public hospitals
2. Medical records are integral to their usefulness
3. Thus, Rep-X acquisition of samples is also acquisition of public info, the creation of which Indian state sees as valuable, state-owned intellectual property

India/CBT “does not want IP because it thinks that the source of genetic information should be valued, it wants IP because it realizes that generating medical records is part of the inventive procedure.” (69-70)

Indian position: not colonial expropriation but industrial theft (“biopiracy”)

BIOCAPITAL CONTRADICTIONS

“MARKET LOGIC” CONTRADICTIONS

“To reconfigure regimes of exchange and maximize value, one sees, in the United States, corporations taking strategic recourse to a gift economy, and, in India, the state taking strategic recourse to a market economy” (72)

CRITIQUE OF INVENTIVENESS

- ✓ Conceptual arguments about “invention” insufficient
- ✓ Materiality must be accounted for (material/cultural)

BIOPOLITICS & GLOBALIZATION

“ACCOUNTING FOR” & “TAKING CARE OF” POPULATIONS

1. These move to center of gov't rationality
2. *Via* institutions, techniques, disciplines...

“it is not surprising that biopolitical regulation—the regulation calculation, accounting for bodies, decisions about who lives and who dies becomes central to the calculus of this new governmental rationality.” (79)

CORPORATE REGIMES OF GOVERNANCE

FROM COLONY TO CLIENT

Asymmetries in globalization in the context of biocapital = reconfigurations of imperial power into vendor, and colony into client (80)

INDEBTEDNESS

1. Moral indebtedness – gifting, symbolic capital
2. Monetary indebtedness – financial debt