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“A Sea of Profit: Piracy, Fishing and Protection in the Western Indian Ocean”

Teaching Water: Global Perspectives on a Resource in Crisis

August 5-8, 2013, Harvard University

Minute 00:00 - 6:10

Context and goals for lecture: Explanations for causes of piracy in the Indian Ocean

Key Content

The question of piracy in the Indian Ocean is a question of who controls the sea in Northern Somalia.

The Indian Ocean itself is a crucial component of a multi-trillion dollar fishing industry.

Some explanations for piracy focus on lawlessness on land and piracy as terrorism; Dua offers an explanation focused more on piracy as a form of protection.

Discussion Questions

What words and images come to mind when you think about pirates? Where do these associations come from?

According to Dua, what conditions have academics referred to in the past to explain piracy?

What conditions will Dua talk about? Which more closely connect to the associations you have with piracy?

What factors shape how individuals and communities define legitimate work, criminal activity, and the difference between the two?

Minute 6:10 - 10:05

Defining protection in the context of piracy

Key Content

In many cases of piracy in Somalia, ransoms are charged for the ship's crew, and no cargo is stolen. The idea of charging people's protection as "armed entrepreneurship" has a long history dating back to caravan trade.

In this framework piracy is legitimized as a form of work.

Discussion Questions

Jatin Dua has spoken with many people who identify themselves as pirates. How would they describe what it means to be a pirate? How might they defend this way of making money to someone who calls it criminal activity? Do you agree with this way of understanding piracy? Why or why not?

Minute 10:05 - 23:55

Somalia's relationship to fishing and rights to the sea as coastal state contributed to the rise of what we now know as piracy.

Key Content

Global fishing is a very large part of the global economy. However, Somalis have had a historical disdain for fish and dependence on fish, which post-independence leader Mohamed Siad Barre tried to change in the name of economic self-sufficiency. The short lived investment in fisheries resulted, instead, in a large presence of foreign ships which were granted licenses to travel and fish.

The United Nations Convention on the Law of the Seas granted Exclusive Economic Zones, a compromise between Free Seas (people from any nation can fish in a sea) and Closed Seas (only people from bordering coastal nations can fish in a sea). Exclusive Economic Zones allow for a 200-nautical mile zone, which is exclusively available to those coastal states. Within these zones Somalis would approach foreign boats to sell them fishing licenses. Mini state-like entities on land started to shift from protection via ad hoc licensing to protection via organized piracy. Former Somali coast guards, trained by security firms, scaled up to "protecting" bigger and bigger ships.

Discussion Questions

How is ownership and access to part of a sea similar to ownership of land? How is it different? Do you think it makes sense to think of these kinds of ownership in the same way or not?

What is the "free seas" approach to ownership and access to seas? What is the "closed seas" approach? How is the EEZ (Exclusive Economic Zones) a compromise between these? Which do you think makes the most sense? Why?

Minute 23:55 - 30:40

Conclusion

Key Content

Piracy grew to involve people from all over Somalia and the diaspora who saw themselves as imposing a retroactive tax on international fishers.

Dua argues that this piracy is not the result of lawlessness on land, but rather the presence of many decentralized groups, all of which see themselves as imposing regulation.

Discussion Questions

*What responsibilities do you think coastal nations have to allow others to access the seas along their borders? What rights do you think other individuals, groups, or nations have to seas that do **not** border their countries?*

How do the Somalis that Dua interviewed understand these rights and responsibilities? How would you respond to their understanding?

Minute 30:40 - 45:25

Question and Answer from the Audience