

Hunter-gatherer situations

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With CHAGS 11 hunter-gatherer studies are likely to enter a phase of institutional consolidation and stability since there is now an international organization that ensures continuity of the conference series and - by launching its own journal – also continuity in terms of a multidisciplinary scholarly forum. However, many challenges to the field persist, above all the disempowered life that many contemporary hunting and gathering people are forced to live and the reservations against the re-affirmation of aspects connected to a foraging way of life. This lecture makes an attempt to set some new bearings that can be helpful for our field in the current situation.

As a conceptual point of departure, I consider the notion of "Lage", a German term that is not limited to mean "location" and "position", but also "condition" and "situation". I suggest that we have for far too long been focusing on the *locations* in which hunting and gathering takes place. Specific world regions and eco zones may have seemed to be "natural forager habitats" but they have also been shared with people following very different subsistence pursuits – and foraging has also been taking place elsewhere. More recently, much damage has been done to hunter-gatherers and to scholarly discourse by what is now called the eliminativist agenda. The proponents sought to eliminate the category "forager" (together with the ethnic designations linked to it) and to reduce it to a constructed *position* imposed on marginalized people in systems of capitalist exploitation and in systems of "ethnicization" discourses. Instead, I propose to give more attention to the *conditions* of hunting and gathering by developing non-reductionist ways that bring together what tends to be separated into ecological versus socio-political conditions (or into scientific versus humanistic directions). Furthermore, by presenting examples from field research in Africa, Asia and Australia I outline the potential of investigating hunter-gatherer *situations* and what they implicate. As ethnographic research is more generally shifting from taking groups as its subject matter to looking at social situations instead, the study of hunting and gathering, too, can continue to be enriched. Present and future anthropological field researchers need not be too preoccupied with the classification of groups as types of societies but they need to engage with an ever more fine-grained analysis of social practices.