

* 36. Hunter-gatherer ecologies: Paths forward

16120 - Emplacing Human-Animal Relations

Presentation type: Oral presentation

Author(s): Anderson, David G. (University of Aberdeen, Aberdeen, Un. Kingdom / Ver Königr.)

Hunter-gather studies until recently have been dominated by an ecological framework which assumes scarcity and calorie-harvesting to be the structural element which preconditions social relationships. This has always stood in stark contrast the worldview of hunter-gatherers themselves who experience the landscape and animals as social entities and who negotiate relationships on this basis. Recently, a starker school, motivated by an ontological turn, sketch out separate domains of material objects and animate entities while entangled can never engage socially ever at all. Here I wish to discuss recent advances in geoarchaeological methodology including soil chemical studies and microelement analysis which has led to a new narrative arena where human-animal relationships are embedded into landscapes in a literal way yet also a reflective and active way. The emplacement of ecology through laboratory talk ironically leads to a set of postulates where First People narratives and Scientific narratives begin to start from the same premise.

16091 - Hunter-gatherers' rights in theory and practice

Presentation type: Oral presentation

Author(s): *Minter, Tessa (Leiden University, Leiden, Netherlands / Niederlande)*

In my contribution to the roundtable discussion Hunter-gatherer ecologies: paths forward, I would like to depart from the statement in the panel abstract that “Whatever the nature of the environmental problem ... rights and equity issues are often sidelined”

This phrase contains an important avenue for future hunter-gatherer research. While the term ‘sidelined’ is definitely here for a reason, it may unjustly suggest that rights and equity issues have hardly received attention. This is not the case: over the past decades, highly effective indigenous rights advocacy work has resulted in often far reaching legal and policy reforms that apply to hunter-gatherer societies worldwide. Such reforms not only include policy guidelines by large conservation agencies and international financial institutions, but also legally binding frameworks adopted by national governments and the United Nations.

The problem is however, that in the cases where such progress is made, the policy guideline or law is welcomed as a ‘land-mark’ document, and that its passing is taken as the ultimate achievement of a goal. However, as Castillo and Castillo (2009) have worded it so well: ‘the law is not enough’. Rather than it being the end of an often lengthy process, the granting of rights is only just the start of a new situation that no government agency, no NGO and indeed no hunter-gatherer society has prior experience with. It poses new problems that need detailed documentation and analysis, in order to provide clues of how rights and equity issues can be addressed in practice.

I will illustrate this point based on my research in the Philippines, a relatively progressive country when it comes to indigenous rights legislation, where I’ve had the privilege to work with the Agta since 2002. Part of my work involves studying the implementation of indigenous rights legislation with respect to environmental decision making. This included situations where Agta were given the legal right to participate in protected area management; and cases where logging and mining companies tried to obtain Free Prior and Informed Consent (FPIC) from resident Agta communities.

Detailed documentation of what happens when such legal frameworks are put into practice brings to light how complicated it is to make it really work, particularly in relation to hunter-gatherer societies. What does ‘participation in decision making’ mean in a setting where illiterate, acephalous hunter-gatherers are at a meeting table with local governors and mayors? How is a negotiation process about compensation of damage to forest resources between highly fragmented hunter-gatherer communities and cosmopolitan, legally trained company representatives best organized?

It turns out that empirical studies of how such rights are given meaning in practice and how we could ‘measure’ their impact on hunter-gatherer resilience are limited. I would therefore like to make a plea for more empirical work on cases where rights and equity issues are being taken into account at least on paper, and to what effect.

16071 - Hunter-Gatherers, Anthropology and Ourselves

Presentation type: Oral presentation

Author(s): Winterhalder, Bruce (*U of California, Davis, Coos Bay, OR, USA*)

We are 80 years since Julian Steward and Jane (Cannon) Steward drove from Berkeley to the Owens Valley and into the Great Basin to record what they could retrieve about the lifeways of Native American hunter-gatherers in that region from the memories of scattered elders still living there (Basin-Plateau Aboriginal Socio-Political Groups, 1938). We are nearly 50 years since the conference that initiated these CHAGS meetings, the substance of which eventually composed the (1968) *Man the Hunter* book. That's sufficient interval to ask what have we learned about hunter-gatherers, about our science of anthropology, and about ourselves since these prominent points of origin. It is sufficient interval to think we might with some prescience comment on what is most pressing about what remains to be learned. In the brief time allotted, I will cover by way of intellectual history and reference to bibliographic content, some of the high and the low points that must be considered in answer to these questions. Grounded mainly in a materialist perspective, I will comment on the formalist/substantivist debate, the Great (or, not so Great) Kalahari debate, the simple versus complex foragers debate, materialist versus postmodern debate, and other spasms that have occupied our intellectual tradition, and that we sometimes share with anthropology more generally. I will argue that we should be hoping for a more synthetic and tolerant scholarship because we know both more and, sometimes, much, much less than we are tempted to perceive, and because we and our writing underwrite, sometimes unwittingly, quite a lot of modern commentary on the human condition and prospect.

16033 - Comparative ethnobotany of Bornean groups

Presentation type: Oral presentation

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What are the possibilities of a comparative ethnobiological approach? Human perception of the nature has been much discussed by the approach from 1960s to 1990s, but other topics such as environmental utilization and ethnohistory are less studied with the exceptions of some insightful works mainly from South America and Africa. In my ongoing research project, plant lexemes and other ethnobotanical knowledge are compared among hunter-gatherer and farmer groups of Borneo. In a preliminary comparison of the Western and Eastern Penan hunter-gatherer groups, primary plant lexemes show a cognate percentage of about 50%, much lower than that for general words. There is also significant difference in medicinal plant knowledge between the groups. The result suggests that some parts of the ethnobotanical knowledge are subject to change according different group histories. More groups will be included in the comparison to reveal similarities and differences in ethnobotanical knowledge among the groups and discuss environmentally and socially defined parts of the knowledge. Possible phylogenetic relationships between the groups may also be reconstructed using the data.

Commentary: Facilitating continuity and responsiveness in hunter-gatherer research

Presentation type: Oral presentation

Author(s): Dounias, Edmond (*Institut de Recherche pour le Développement (IRD), Montpellier, France / Frankreich*)

Hunter-gatherer societies are increasingly (and legitimately) demanding more concrete and short-term outcomes from research in terms of impact and development. They express strong fatigue for just being the “objects of study” of long-staying ecological anthropologists. Research is trying to conciliate between the need to carry out long-term and patient fieldwork on the one hand, and respond to the legitimate expectations of hunter-gatherer societies to rapidly get their share of “development” on the other. The rapidity of ongoing change is seldom compatible with the required long-term perspective of research dedicated to these groups.

There are two alternate ways of conducting research that would help deal with this paradox. The first one is to better take advantage of past research in order to carry out diachronic studies with a time interval of 10 to 20 years. The current generation of researchers has a key role to play in facilitating the installation of a new generation of young researchers to continue working with the same group of people while having better access to the field notes of their predecessors. We need to prepare now the bridge between our recent past research activities and those that are yet to be done by younger others in the very near future. The major difference with our predecessors is that we are more familiar with modern ways of archiving primary data.

The second is to take advantage of “observatories” (called sentinel landscape programmes in the CGIAR jargon) that are set up by international organizations in hot spots of integrated research programmes dedicated to the study of biodiversity and/or climate change. Such implications would be intellectually stimulating since the hunter-gatherer specialists would have to collaborate with other scientists, but also with other stakeholders (conservationists, decision makers, industry companies, etc). In this context, research pathways need to respect a series of short/middle term outcomes while taking advantage of an overall long-run context of research facilities and funding.