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Chapter 1. An Introduction to Environmental Anthropology.

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As so many of us are all too aware, we have entered the Anthropocene, marked by the large and active imprint that humans have made on the global environment. Environmental social sciences and environmental anthropology, in particular, have long focused on the interaction between human societies, cultures, and complex environments – both in physical and symbolic terms. Yet, as the world changes in response to the expansion of human presence and influence, a number of analytical frameworks, as well as ideologies have been developed to address culture and nature in the era of human-dominated environments. As the contributions to this Handbook demonstrate, the subfield of environmental anthropology is responding to cultural adaptations and responses to environmental changes in multiple and complex ways. As a discipline concerned primarily with human-environment interaction, environmental anthropologists recognize that we are now working within a pressure cooker of rapid environmental damage that is forcing behavioral and often cultural changes around the world. As we see in the breadth of topics presented in this volume, these environmental challenges have inspired renewed foci on traditional topics such as food procurement, ethnobiology, and spiritual ecology; and a broad new range of subjects, such as resilience, nonhuman rights, architectural anthropology, industrialism, and education. These studies are illustrated by intensive ethnographic case studies supported by 'traditional' anthropological as well as innovative and transdisciplinary methodologies in pursuit of a more ecologically holistic understanding of the human-environment relationship and perhaps even solutions to environmental degradation.

The field of Anthropology is broken into four subfields: physical/biological anthropology, social/cultural anthropology, linguistic anthropology, and archaeology; as well as, applied (sometimes called engaged or participatory) anthropology. Environmental or Ecological Anthropology is a specialization within cultural anthropology that studies historic and present human-environment interactions. Although the terms, Environmental and Ecological anthropology, are often used interchangeably, environmental anthropology is considered by some to be the applied dimension of ecological anthropology which encompasses the broad topics of

primate ecology, paleoecology, cultural ecology, ethno-ecology, ethno-ornithology, historical ecology, political ecology, spiritual ecology, human behavioral and evolutionary ecology. It has been argued that the new ecological anthropology, or what is often referred to in this volume as environmental anthropology, mirrors more general changes in the discipline: the shift from research focusing on a single community or unique culture “to recognizing pervasive linkages and concomitant flows of people, technology, images, and information, and to acknowledging the impact of differential power and status in the postmodern world on local entities. In the new ecological anthropology, everything is on a larger scale” (Kottak 1999:25).

This Handbook takes as its point of departure today’s pressing environmental challenges, ranging from climate change to biodiversity loss, and pollution to the depletion of natural resources, with contributors acknowledging and discussing a number of areas of tension embodied in these challenges. Such tensions exist between local livelihoods and international conservation efforts, between communities and wildlife, and finally between traditional ways of living and ‘modernity’. While traditional ways of living used to be characterized by a relatively moderate effect on habitats due to low population densities and inherently sustainable subsistence practices, advanced neoliberal capitalism is characterized by the commodification of nature and its elements. This volume is thus premised on the idea that while these tensions cannot be easily resolved, they can be better understood by considering both social and ecological effects, in equal measure.

Some anthropologists presented in this Handbook work towards global sustainability at a time when efforts to conserve biodiversity and reduce carbon emissions that cause climate change correspond with land grabs by large corporations, food insecurity, and human displacement. While they seek to reconcile more-than-human relations and responsibilities in the Anthropocene, they also struggle to accommodate social justice and the seemingly global desire for economic development. One could argue that the expansion of human influence is responsible for the destruction of natural systems, including the current threats to biodiversity, disruption of the planet’s climate, and the large-scale pollution of land, water, and air. Many critical social scientists argue that the discipline of anthropology has not been adequately attentive to these destructive trends, particularly to the expansion of human populations and consumption habits in the context of industrial and economic development. It is also been argued that anthropologists too often discount pressing environmental problems and their causes while focusing on ‘traditional’ anthropological subjects such as the cultural mediation of meaning, and symbolic

interaction with nature and its elements. These arguments are reflected in different sections throughout this Handbook, and help to highlight where and how anthropological expertise – attention to cultural specificity and the micro-analysis of human-environmental interaction, can be integrated into a broader locus of environmental change.

Other contributors are more specifically concerned with the continuation and renewal of anthropological interest in what environment, broadly defined, means for people – in material, social, and culturally-symbolic terms - and with injustices suffered as a consequence of environmental destruction. Much of this work focuses specifically on the vulnerability of structurally weaker and marginal communities, including many indigenous groups during the appropriation of natural resources by industrial developers, as well as on the effects of climate change, natural hazards, and the increasingly frequent incidence of climate change induced migration. Largely as a result of the juxtaposition of issues such as cultural and ecological preservation and/or rights, we have begun to see tensions develop between the Anthropology of development, or anthropology that focuses on indigenous rights to use and/or profit from nature and more conservation-minded efforts to protect fragile habitats. While once anthropologists addressed development as something to be avoided based on its sociocultural impacts, it seems to have taken a place among the anthropological sub-disciplines as an essential part of human life. As many of the contributors to this volume so aptly demonstrate, however, environmental anthropology, is moving towards a stronger recognition of the combined social and environmental consequences of expanding humanity whose existence is dramatically marked by destruction due to the 'progress' of development.

In 2013, Clive Hamilton argued that the dramatic impacts of climate change could mark the end of the social sciences. Hamilton contended that the Kantian dualism of humans and the environment, on which so much social science rests its analyses, "...can no longer be sustained, that the natural and the human are mixed up, and their influences cannot be neatly distinguished." The advent of the Anthropocene," Hamilton warns,

...shatters the self-contained world of social analysis that is the terrain of modern social science and explains why those intellectuals who remain within it find it impossible to "analyze" the politics, sociology or philosophy of climate change in a way that is true to the science. They end up floundering in the old categories, unable to see that something epochal has occurred, a rupture on the scale of the Industrial Revolution or the emergence of civilization itself.

No longer is environmental preservation the exclusive domain of ecosystem scientists and ecologists, rather, conservation and environmental protection must be addressed by scholars and practitioners in their analyses of paleo-environments, habitats, fisheries, industries, rural communities, urban settings, and any locale across the earth where expanding numbers of humans remain both reliant and an active force on the environment. Environmental anthropologists are thus specifically called upon to recognize and pay careful attention to the multiplicity of players in every environment, the variety and origin of conservation ethics around the world, and the value of cultural knowledge of landscapes and environmental change. Just as we have learned that no one formula for conservation will be universally applicable in diverse environments, so too are environmental anthropologists demonstrating that no solution to the worldwide environmental crisis can ignore the human element in every habitat.

Environmental Anthropology: a subfield with a goal

Like ecological and other anthropological subfields, environmental anthropology addresses both the similarities and differences between human cultures. For many environmental anthropologists, one of the aims of their research is largely to find solutions to issues associated with environmental justice, migration, scarcity, and health (Kopnina and Shoreman-Ouimet 2011, 2013, 2015). To this end, over a decade ago, one of the subfield's most environmentally enlightened authors, Kay Milton (1993, 1996, 2002) suggested three main ways in which anthropological knowledge might contribute to the environmentalist cause:

1. *The study of human-environment relations, or anthropology as human ecology.*
2. *Anthropologists as “trans-cultural” interpreters of environmental knowledge and practice*
3. *The study of environmentalism itself as a cultural practice treated as an object of analysis.*

Milton (1993: 80) argues that an anthropologist's engagement should include "active involvement in the discourse of environmentalism, in the process of defining and implementing environmental responsibilities." This volume presents the myriad ways that environmental anthropologists are responding to such calls for environmental engagement, study, and advocacy. The following chapters have been organized to demonstrate this dynamism and the pertinence of this ever-evolving study of human-environment interaction. They include examples of interdisciplinary, environmentally focused projects that are bringing anthropology to the forefront of community conservation projects, climate adaptation and mitigation, environmental health studies, and policy

initiatives. The contributors to this volume take into account a range of environmental and social issues around the world and present various examples of environmental degradation, ethics, and knowledge, as well as, instances of environmental conservation efforts and learning. They furthermore provide valuable methods of accessing such knowledge and insightful theoretical frameworks for assessing and synthesizing cultural and environmental data. The authors seek to demonstrate how environmental anthropologists are contributing to the world's understanding of how human beings have diversely occupied, interacted with, damaged, and sustained the environment over time, and how environmental anthropology can serve as a policy-tool and applied science to help all of humanity adapt to and remedy current environmental crises.

Introducing the Sections

This *Handbook of Environmental Anthropology* is broken into seven sections written by accomplished academics as well as young scholars from anthropology and related disciplines, and demonstrates the range of work currently being conducted within the subfield, as well as those issues and ideas that the authors believe will, and/or perhaps should, characterize the future of the study. It is our hope that this collection will enable scholars to quickly and easily access both established and trending environmental anthropological explorations into theory, methodology and practice; and provide students with the opportunity to learn more about the topics that the field's most prominent researchers consider pertinent to the field and its service to peoples and environments around the world.

The first section introduces us to the development of environmental anthropology as a distinct sub-field and its central theoretical issues and provides extensive intellectual histories and commentary by the contributors. As these chapters discuss, a number of key developments in the history of environmental anthropology can be identified. First, there is a move from the studies of communities as self-enclosed entities towards recognizing them as part of wider political-ecological systems and questioning their 'boundedness'. Second, there has been a move away from synchronic and toward diachronic approaches, as well as a general shift in the field away from assumptions of equilibrium toward assumptions of disequilibrium. Third, environmental anthropology is not just becoming more involved with politics, but starting to become more political itself. Fourth, environmental anthropology has become increasingly influenced by post-structural theory. Finally, environmental anthropology is becoming increasingly interdisciplinary, freely crossing the boundaries between the natural and social sciences, as well as the humanities.

In addition to providing thorough examinations of environmental anthropology in distant and more recent history, this section also presents specific examinations of subjects, such as ethnobiology and ethnoclassifications systems, further demonstrating the development of not only the field as a whole, but the ways in which the branches of environmental anthropology have developed in conjunction with scientific and ethnographic inquiry.

Section Two presents further investigations into the subfields of environmental anthropology and provides a wide breadth of lenses through which to view the human-environmental relationship. It brings together works on a range of topics including material culture studies, agency, architectural anthropology, as well as puts forth recommendations for moving past anthropocentric and ecocentric divides and towards reconciliation between social and/or ecological justice. While examining these specific subfields, this section also provides examples of innovative ethnographic subjects and methodologies to demonstrate the ways in which anthropologists can utilize traditional and novel lenses to explore the range of ways in which humans dwell in, identify, and modify the environment.

Section Three delves into the connections between knowledge, belief, and sustainability, and the rich repository of ethical history and practical knowledge that can inform current sustainability efforts. Because sustainability is a global cause with all cultures, peoples, creeds, and nationalities at stake, the contributors to this section have been chosen for their particular attention to cultural attempts at sustainability, defined in environmental, social, and broad conceptual terms. In addition, several of the authors included in this section provide invaluable critiques of the enterprise of sustainable development and address the myriad ways in which the recent combining of sustainability initiatives with economic interests carries neoliberal and neocolonial undertones that makes many question whether the goal of such efforts is human-environmental wellbeing or economic control. The included chapters speak to the many instances of cultural beliefs that espouse unity with nature and the powerful connection between spirituality and sustainability. Also included in this section are chapters speaking more specifically to the nature of environmental knowledge, the origins and language of unsustainability and how anthropology as a discipline engages with and contributes to discourses on sustainability and energy. In anthropological efforts to understand and investigate sustainable initiatives and get to the heart of motivation and foreseeable outcomes, the authors included here demonstrate that the future of environmental anthropology may need to be more focused on finding the universals that underlie

human differences and understanding how these universals can best be put to use to end environmental damage.

In Section Four, contributors address the urgent issues related to resilience and vulnerability to natural hazards, disasters, and the rippling effects of climate change. It is not surprising that anthropologists are intimately involved in the study of how communities are affected by and respond to the effects of climate change and natural disasters. The authors of these chapters, themselves, have been particularly instrumental in describing the history of community response to the disaster as well as how we must be prepared to assess vulnerability and resilience in the future. They demonstrate that understanding the effects that climate change and natural disasters have on human communities depend on developing appropriate conceptual tools that can adequately frame the sociocultural construction of risks and effects and the impacts of those effects.

Section Five includes chapters on the equally pressing and related issues of justice, ethics, and governance. Here, authors explore recent developments in the relationship between anthropology and the environment from the perspective of justice. The recent shift towards the interdisciplinary study of the human-environment relationship is largely driven by environmental justice debates. Today, researchers debate the primacy of 4 different types of environmental justice, linking them to questions of neoliberalism and altruism. This section highlights all sides of the debates over environmental and ecological justice - those that fight for cultural rights over environmental prioritization, those that believe that discrimination against nonhuman species is equivalent to racism and sexism, as well as those seeking to strike a balance and establish a more stringent code of environmental ethics in anthropological research. This section also presents the investigation of ethics, power, environmental governance and policy and is intended to marry the previous section on climate change with research in political ecology and political science on how necessary policy changes are being and will be considered, established, implemented, and regulated. This includes historically anthropological issues of common property regimes/managing the commons; as well as recent work on issues like “co-management”; and the construction of subjectivities.

Section Six grapples with the important intersections of health, population, and the environment, combining insights from different sub-disciplines related to anthropology that deal with both health and environmental topics, such as medical anthropology, ecological sociology, and

environmental health; as well as food production and cultural food movements. This section emphasizes the importance of understanding food, health, and disease as biosocial processes that often require considering the intersection of values, species lifeways, as well as socioeconomics, industrialization and the threats posed to humans and nonhumans by human-induced environmental changes. Many of these changes have been caused by the sheer volume of people on this planet, and given the rapid continuation of human population growth, it is likely that the evolutionary, ecological and sociocultural impacts of our presence will only deepen. Thus, this section takes on difficult questions about how humans are choosing to nourish, care and protect themselves as individuals while simultaneously threatening their own and all other species' existence by their sum total.

Section Seven, the final section of this handbook, underlines the urgency of the world's environmental crisis through the study of education and the impact of globalization, industrialization, as well as the power of local environmental knowledge and experience around the world. These chapters give us a glimpse into how children see the environment, speak of the environment and their capacity to care for it. They demonstrate the loss of nature contact that so many children suffer through didactic forms of institutionalized education and decreasing exposure to the natural environment. Yet, the chapters also give several examples of how we can improve upon this reality. These examples include methodologies for engaging young people in environments and traditional ways of taking from, and giving back to the natural world. The chapters in this section discuss important philosophies for anthropologists on the role that we can and must play in converting our knowledge of human relationships with nature into a support system for fostering environmentally sound and protective relationships in the future.

As the chapters in this Handbook demonstrate, environmental anthropologists have unique access, as well as tools, theories and skill sets for understanding the relationship between human cultures and the environment. Not only can these methodologies help illuminate the basis for culturally diverse perceptions of the environment and environmental damage around the world, but they can help to dissolve cultural barriers to conservation and be used to determine motivational triggers, communicate the benefits of conservation, and inform environmental education efforts. Throughout this book, authors address the underlying importance of utilizing the strengths of anthropological knowledge. In highlighting motivation, cultural norms, values, and beliefs as well as logistical and ideological barriers to environmental action, anthropologists

improve our understanding of the world around us and the diversity of ways of existing on this planet.

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