

The Ethnohistory and Anthropology of 'Modern' Hunter-Gatherers

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The Oxford Handbook of the Archaeology and Anthropology of Hunter-Gatherers

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Abstract and Keywords

There is an extensive ethnographic and historical literature on hunting and gathering peoples living in different parts of the world. This chapter presents a general outline of the most important themes, debates and approaches in hunter-gatherer studies, and links these to the development of a series of distinct regional research traditions in Africa, Australia, the Americas, south-east Asia, and northern Eurasia. The main achievements of this body of research are considered, and recent developments and some key directions for future work are also identified.

Keywords: Hunter-gatherers, forager–farmer contact, culture-contact, colonialism, ethnohistory, horticulture, carbohydrates, fur trade, taxation, descendent communities

Introduction and Main Aims of Part VI

THIS part links two major themes in the handbook. Specifically, it provides a bridge between the *archaeological* study of past hunter-gatherers through their surviving material remains (Parts II–V), and the increasingly professionalized *anthropological* study of contemporary foragers through direct observation, historical research, and ethnographic fieldwork.

Until a few centuries ago, there were at least some hunting and gathering populations still living in most world regions. Many of these foragers, for example, in Africa and across Eurasia, had already been in culture-contact for centuries, if not millennia; other groups, such as Australia's Aborigines and many Arctic peoples living in North America, interacted only with other hunter-gatherers, and had yet to experience more direct encounters with farmers, pastoralists, urban centres, and empires. However, by 1500 AD all these hunter-gatherers stood on the brink of a major new era of global transformation, and had yet to experience the full onslaught of European colonial expansion.

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This historical process played out over the following centuries, causing major cultural dislocations and often painful local adjustments for many indigenous peoples. Impacts on local hunter-gatherer societies ranged from demographic collapses due to the introduction of new diseases, increasing government monitoring and control, forced resettlement and acculturation, through to full-scale persecution, and in several cases, to wholesale cultural annihilation.

It was also within this wider colonial and historical framework that the first detailed descriptions of hunting and gathering populations first began to emerge, followed by the more systematic documentations performed by government administrators, and only later by ethnographic studies conducted by professionalized anthropologists undertaking (p. 904) long-term fieldwork with the few remaining forager communities. The range of ethnographically documented foragers therefore reflects only a relatively small subset of a much wider range of earlier hunting and gathering populations, and many of these groups had already undergone fundamental transformations before detailed documentation had even commenced.

While the colonial encounter provided Euro-American intellectuals with the basic ethnographic subject matter for inventing the concept of 'hunter-gatherers', the term also expressed a uniquely Western interest in classifying the world's cultural diversity into ascending social evolutionary schema, which in turn reflected the wider Enlightenment concerns with the mission of moral and economic improvement that were prevalent at the time (see Barnard; Pluciennik, Part I).

Knowledge and understanding of the people who went on to become classified by Western intellectuals as hunter-gatherers are therefore products of highly specific historical circumstances. Reflecting this, some of the watershed debates about hunting and gathering societies tended to focus on rather narrowly defined selections of cultural groups and geographic regions, albeit leading to important early breakthroughs in anthropological insight and understanding. At certain times, some hunter-gatherer research initiatives pursued a comparative approach, and sought to identify *shared* features of foraging societies living in a range of different regions; at other junctures, the concern was to explore the *specificity* of local ethnographic and historical information about particular forager groups, whose attributes, ethnic identities, and cultural patterns were presented as being relatively unique features of specific world regions. As these debates about hunter-gatherers evolved and changed, so also did the thematic and geographic focus of enquiry. In many cases, several 'new' groups and regions that had initially been excluded from mainstream hunter-gatherer studies were later included, in some cases becoming a primary focus for fresh debates and alternative theoretical perspectives.

In focusing on understanding how these regional hunter-gatherer research traditions emerged and diversified, it is also important to understand that these do not necessarily map in a clear or predictable way onto national research traditions. Research into African hunter-gatherers, for example, has been highly international from the outset. In contrast, work within other national boundaries has been more isolated, and indeed idiosyncratic—

Russian/Soviet work on its northern indigenous peoples is an obvious example, but there are others (see Barnard 2004).

In this way, modern geopolitics has also played an implicit role in structuring the history of hunter-gatherer research, with large areas like Siberia initially excluded from debates in the *Man the hunter* era in the 1960s, and then partially rehabilitated after the opening up of new academic contacts towards the end of the Cold War (Murdoch 1968; Schweitzer 2000). The contingent intersections between these regional and national research trajectories also generate highly complex 'landscapes' of scholarship and debate that can be daunting for both new and established researchers.

The primary goal of this part is, therefore, to focus on understanding some of the shifting content of the inherent historicity of divergent hunter-gatherer research traditions as they have played out in different parts of the globe. Individual chapters aim to critically examine some of these local traditions of scholarship across a broadly representative suite of regions.

Finally, it is also worth making it clear what this part does *not* aim to do. The concern here is not to present encyclopaedic or comprehensive descriptive treatment of different (p. 905) hunter-gatherer 'tribes' or 'bands', with summary accounts of material culture, social organization, and world view—this has been done many times before on both regional, continental, and even on global scales (e.g. Lee and Daly 2001). Readers seeking this kind of descriptive data should consult the extensive ethnographic literatures on individual hunter-gatherer groups in the chapters in this handbook and the references cited therein.

Modern Hunter-Gatherers: General Research Trends

As explored through this handbook, for complex historical and intellectual reasons, anthropological debates about global cultural diversity moved into different directions (Pluciennik, Part I). Within the framework of nineteenth-century social evolutionary thinking, it was commonly assumed that all foragers represented a similar kind of society, and that these 'modern' hunter-gatherers represented a rather straightforward analogue to 'ancient' peoples, for example, the hunting societies of the Palaeolithic and Mesolithic. Anthropologists and archaeologists went on to become interested in identifying the common features of both modern and ancient hunting and gathering societies living in different parts of the world, whether in terms of subsistence, social organization, ideology, or general mode of existence. This task was thought to be somewhat easier for anthropologists as they could directly observe these behaviours during fieldwork, but it was also assumed by archaeologists that these kinds of ethnographic insights could be applied relatively uncritically to the study of prehistoric foragers—past and present foragers constituted the same kinds of society, and occupied similar stages of general cultural progress.

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Attempts at developing a more comprehensive and rigorous comparative analysis of the foraging mode of existence also became an important theme within the cultural ecology approach that emerged in the mid-twentieth century. These efforts reached a high point in the *Man the hunter* era of the late 1960s. In particular, they were reflected in initial formulations of 'nomadic style' and the depiction of hunter-gatherers as the 'original affluent society'. Here, the general goal for anthropologists working with modern foraging societies was to look beyond the 'noise' of local ethnographic detail, and to try and identify and explain the typical features of all hunter-gatherer societies, whether in terms of band-scale and egalitarian social organization, or through their adaptive responses to the demands of the local ecology. Approached from this highly comparative perspective, modern foragers were generally depicted as being rather timeless, isolated, and self-contained populations, whose salient features were primarily generated by the functional requirements of meeting specific kinds of environmental challenge.

Subsequent anthropological debates have primarily served to undermine these earlier attempts at identifying traits that can be used to define all hunter-gatherers as a single kind of society. Initial responses to the appreciation of inherent variability among hunter-gatherers included attempts to refine typologies and define smaller and more specific subsets, including the distinction between 'simple' versus 'complex' hunter-gatherers. More recently, anthropologists have accepted that hunting and gathering societies are perhaps best characterized by a relentless and highly localized flexibility—there is very little that can be (p. 906) said to be typical of all groups, whether in terms of subsistence, ideology, or social organization (Kelly 1995, 34–5). Some scholars have now gone so far as to reject the very term 'hunter-gatherers' as an outmoded concept that lacks intellectual utility (Pluciennik, Part I); others maintain that it remains a useful point of analytical departure into a more contextual analysis of forager variability (Kelly 1995, 35).

Equally important in these more recent debates has been the growing appreciation of the significance of long-term culture-contacts between foragers and 'differently organized others', including horticulturalists, pastoralists, states, and empires. Many central attributes of modern hunting and gathering groups may, in fact, be direct outcomes of these wider historical encounters, and not reflect timeless features of an older mode of human existence, as had earlier been assumed. If many central features of modern hunting and gathering societies are indeed responses to recent culture-contacts, then at least some of these local ethnographic patterns need to be understood within the context of specific historical trajectories.

A new 'interdependent' model now characterizes much current hunter-gatherer research. Modern foragers are now generally viewed as being local actors embedded within a wider regional matrix of contacts and exchanges that intimately link their lifeways to those of farmers and pastoralists, and also to broader trade and taxation networks, as well as to the constellations of empires and nation states that surround and often contain them as citizens. If mid-twentieth-century anthropologists were primarily interested in identifying the shared features of all hunter-gatherer societies through comparative analysis, more recent scholarship now seeks increasingly to understand the specific history, form, and

content of these wider regional interactions, as well as the ways in which they intersect with more local patterns of forager subsistence and social life.

The current consensus is that modern forager lifeways are inherently flexible and historically contingent. Populations can switch quickly between different subsistence strategies in ways that defy older assumptions of simple linear progress from one economic stage to another, or from relatively simple to more complex forms of social organization. At the same time, there is growing appreciation of the cultural resilience of modern hunter-gatherers within a rapidly changing and relentlessly *globalizing* contemporary world. For many groups, the foraging lifestyle also entails strong moral, ethical, and ideological commitments to the land, and meeting these obligations is a central part of group identity and belief. Hunting, gathering, even moving through the forest and across the ancestral landscape, all form a fundamentally important expression of human existence and spirituality.

Another important development in more recent debate is the fact that modern hunting and gathering communities are no longer regarded as exotic 'others'; that is, as the last surviving exemplars of a rather timeless stage of human existence that had existed everywhere on earth prior to the prehistoric transition to farming and the rise of civilization. Instead, members of modern foraging societies have now regained their rightful status as global citizens. However, this shift in perspective does not bely the fundamental existential challenges that many of these communities now face—all recent or contemporary foraging societies endured long histories of colonial repression, and many still face political and cultural exclusion, economic marginalization, and the destruction of environments used for local livelihoods. Such contemporary situations require active political intervention in order to maintain foragers' property rights, access to ancestral lands and resources, and also to address the wider challenge of ensuring their cultural and linguistic survival. Anthropologists studying and working with these societies face the challenge of making (p. 907) their research more locally relevant. Increasingly, members of indigenous communities are also becoming professional anthropologists.

Organization of Part VI

In nineteenth-century western Europe and North America, the rise of social evolutionary thinking highlighted the importance of economic and social criteria for ordering populations into general schemes of progress. Coeval with this development, forager groups in *some* regions were assumed to represent relatively 'pure' exemplars of this timeless forager lifestyle—the hunter-gatherers of Africa, Australia, and the Americas figured particularly highly in these early discussions. Many have been central to hunter-gatherer studies ever since. In contrast, other regions appeared later in hunter-gatherer debates, while other groups and geographic areas have more isolated and idiosyncratic research histories. Reflecting these concerns, chapters in this part of the handbook are arranged in three groups:

- The first set of chapters examines some of the 'classic' forager societies that became central to the flagship debates of mid-twentieth-century hunter-gatherer studies. These include the paradigmatic hunter-gatherer groups of Australia, Africa, the Great Basin, California, and the Pacific Northwest Coast. Many figured highly in early formulations of 'nomadic style', iconic depictions of the 'original affluent society', as well as in early debates about hunter-gatherer 'complexity'. As research evolved and changed, African hunter-gatherer groups of the Kalahari Desert also became central to debates about the implications of culture-contact, and the importance of studying long-term forager histories.
- The second set of chapters focuses on regions that were initially excluded from earlier debates due to the existence of exactly these kinds of long-term culture-contacts with non-foraging societies. Research in South-East Asia (and other world regions) has tended to highlight the role of commercialized forager-traders as culturally resilient *bricoleurs* who play important roles within wider exchange networks, but who remain mutually dependent on farmers for the supplementary carbohydrate sources that enable them to live year-round in the tropical forest ecosystem. Other interesting and alternative insights into local foraging histories can be gained from South America. Here, many hunter-gatherers appear to have 'regressed' from horticulture back to foraging due to widespread colonial dislocations, a pattern that highlights the inherent historical contingency of the foraging lifestyle. Clearly, there are many possible 'pathways' to foraging, and these South American examples provide a fundamental challenge to social evolutionary schema, which assume an inevitable and irreversible cultural progression from hunting and gathering through to farming.
- The third and final set of chapters broadly examines hunter-gatherer histories across northern Eurasia, an extensive region that spans northern Europe (Fennoscandia), through Siberia, and across to North-East Asia. Here, the many different hunting, fishing, and gathering groups share a broadly similar set of historical trajectories, and while only the Saami and the Ainu are examined in more detail, the general insights have (p. 908) relevance to hunter-gatherer research across the wider region. Particularly important here is the use of (ethno)historical data to study local strategies for cul-

tural resilience within the complex dynamics generated by long-term culture-contact with incoming settler populations, states, and empires.

'Classic' Regions of Research

African Hunter-Gatherers

Hitchcock provides a detailed analysis of anthropological research into the hunter-gatherer societies of southern Africa. In the second half of the twentieth century this region emerged as the epicentre of debates about hunter-gatherer bands, their social and political organization, subsistence strategies, gender roles, and general work ethic. In the *Man the hunter* era of the late 1960s and early 1970s, the Ju/'hoansi were taken to exemplify one of humanity's oldest kinds of adaptation, a way of life captured by the concept of 'nomadic style' and serving to illustrate the notion of foragers being the 'original affluent society'. By the mid-1980s, these groups were again playing a central role, but this time within savage purist-revisionist debates about the degree to which these modern hunter-gatherers represented an older and rather timeless way of life, or the extent to which they were better understood as being members of a rural underclass that had been marginalized through long-term culture-contact and integration with the wider region's political economy. As this 'Kalahari Debate' slowly unfolded, increasing attention was paid to historical and also archaeological evidence to better understand some of these deeper patterns of regional interaction and long-term change. The intensity of ethnographic interest and debate has also been paralleled by long-term field research—today, the Ju/'hoansi are some of the best documented people on the planet, with much contemporary work also focusing on addressing developmental issues.

In a similar vein, Hewlett and Fancher provide a comprehensive critical analysis of the highly internationalized work conducted among hunter-gatherers in central Africa. This scholarship is also rather diverse, has likewise been broadly dominated by ecological and scientific approaches, but also includes a concern with understanding the deep cultural affinity that these groups have with the forest. More recently, there have been increases in development and conservation work, and growing interest in exploring culture-contact dynamics. The latter has included research into the 'carbohydrate question'; that is, the extent to which hunter-gatherers can actually survive in tropical forests without supplementary foodstuffs acquired through exchange networks that link them with farmers. If culture-contact is a fundamental prerequisite to foraging adaptations to tropical forests, how old can this way of life actually be? Hewlett and Fancher conclude their review with an outline of directions for future work. Basic ethnographic fieldwork is still required among some groups, and much more humanities-orientated research could be done to better understand how these forager cultures think and feel about sharing, egalitarianism, gender relations, family, religion, and the spiritual world, all of which would offset the predominance of ecological research themes noted above.

(p. 909) Australian Aborigines

A review of Australian hunter-gatherer research is provided by Keen. From the outset, this body of research has been marked by enormous intellectual diversity, but can be broadly characterized by an early and enduring focus on investigating Aborigine social organization, marriage patterns, and religion, rather than the role of ecology and adaptation. As an important source region for basic ethnographic datasets, descriptions of the Aborigines also fed into some of the foundational theories of kinship that were central to anthropology in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries as it gradually emerged as a professional academic discipline.

In the mid-1960s, attention was primarily focused on understanding the essential features of African forager societies, for example, in relation to definitions of 'nomadic style'. However, Australia also remained important, and ethnographic depictions of Aborigine groups were central to Sahlins's formulations of the 'original affluent society' (Sahlins 1968; 1972). Following *Man the hunter*, there was a marked growth of ecologically orientated field research among Australian groups, and interest in exploring gender roles also increased. Keen also notes that in Australia, anthropologists had engaged with policy-making initiatives from the outset, but this trend has grown exponentially in recent years, and now includes active participation by indigenous specialists who combine the roles of researcher and advocate, and who must make the difficult balance of integrating political activism and commentary alongside research and academic writing.

Hunter-Gatherers in Western North America

Robinson examines hunter-gatherer research in California and the Great Basin, regions characterized by strikingly different cultural and linguistic patterns. California's rich and varied environments were densely settled by hunter-gatherer groups, and at European contact, it formed one of the world's most culturally and linguistically diverse regions on the planet. In contrast, the arid deserts of the Great Basin were characterized by much sparser human settlement. Although there are some common roots and themes in the history of nineteenth-century and early twentieth-century scholarship in both these areas, early research interests in California generally focused on the study of cultural diversity, social complexity, and ceremonialism. In the Great Basin, scholars like Julian Steward were more concerned with making sense of the limiting effects of ecological factors on other aspects of hunter-gatherer social organization and behaviour. This work eventually led to the development of the Julian Steward's cultural ecology, which went on to be foundational to the emergence of hunter-gatherer studies as a specific field of enquiry in the mid-twentieth century.

Despite these divergent research trajectories, hunter-gatherer scholarship in both regions reflects the wider historical development of American anthropology, and so shares similar approaches, biases, methods, and theories, all of which evolved in the context of slowly changing relationships between European and First Nation groups. As with many other world regions, early colonialism and the subsequent nation-building project also

generated an extensive ethnohistoric archive of information about indigenous communities, generally from a colonizer's perspective. Only in later periods did (p. 910) the colonial project include deliberate attempts by professional anthropologists to generate systematic knowledge of native peoples prior to contact. From this phase of primary ethnographic data collection, later efforts were directed towards synthesis and interpretation, with later revisionist accounts highlighting the legacy of colonialism, and the dynamics of culture-contact. Also notable is the eventual rise of indigenous activism, and the coeval engagement by anthropologists in these endeavours. Robinson also concludes that early anthropological research in this part of western North America has been important in producing a corpus of ethnographic and ethnohistoric data that is among the richest and most extensive records of hunter-gatherer cultures collected anywhere in world.

Pacific Northwest Coast

O'Neill retains a focus on western North America but focuses particularly on the Pacific Northwest Coast. In many ways, these local cultures have been a perennial source of frustration for scholars attempting to make more general comparative sense of hunter-gatherer societies. At other times, they have provided important ethnographic inspiration for exploring some of the most important features of hunter-gatherer variability. The reasons are simple: on the one hand, all Northwest Coast groups *are* hunter-gatherers (or more precisely, hunter-fisher-gatherers), but on the other hand, almost all their basic attributes and behaviours do not fit with the initial predictions of 'nomadic style' that emerged during the *Man the hunter* era in the 1960s. Instead of small, highly mobile, egalitarian bands possessing minimal property, the Northwest Coast was settled by highly stratified societies, with enduring and institutionalized status differences, who also practised slavery, lived in large, heavily decorated communal long-houses, engaged in endemic warfare, and practised competitive feasting in order to accumulate property and defend status.

The Northwest Coast has an enormous ethnographic literature, and so O'Neill focuses on reviewing two central debates. The first is how best to understand the competitive feasting dynamics that appear so central to socio-political life along the coast. These are epitomized by the large 'potlatch' events that have been well documented and widely analysed by anthropologists from a range of different perspectives. The second theme is the debate that emerged in the 1980s about hunter-gatherer complexity. Many ethnographically documented hunter-gatherer groups inhabit arid regions in Africa and Australia, the Arctic, and other relatively marginal environments, adding an inherent bias to the ethnographic record of variability among foragers. The Northwest Coast offers a relatively rare ethnographic example of a highly productive aquatic ecosystem inhabited entirely by hunter-fisher-gatherers. Importantly, these insights into relatively sedentary, highly stratified, and territorial societies have been widely used by archaeologists attempting to identify potentially similar patterns in prehistory, especially in regions with similar kinds of rich aquatic ecosystems, such as the Baltic region of northern Europe. Finally, O'Neill notes a gradual shift away from the study of the general cultural patterns along the coast using data primarily collected by ethnographers, towards more recent attempts at understand-

ing the longer-term dynamics of the region's hunter-gatherer cultures through greater incorporation of archaeological research.

(p. 911) 'New' Regions and Emerging Debates

Forager-Traders in South-East Asia

The numerous forager groups living across South-East Asia were largely absent from debates during the *Man the hunter* era. Much of this related to what Fortier regards as academic elitism associated with identifying and studying the last 'pure' hunter-gatherers, such as those in the Kalahari. In contrast, it was clear from the outset that foragers in South-East Asia were in intense contact with outsiders. In fact, one of the major challenges for hunter-gatherer researchers working in South-East Asia is attempting to understand the enormous cultural variability that characterizes both these local foraging groups and their links and contacts with outsiders—they inhabit a strikingly wide range of different environments, yet all are tightly embedded into local interaction networks. The remarkable diversity of foraging groups is matched by a similar degree of diversity in regional languages, culture, and also local political and economic settings, of which the foragers form an enduring part.

These general regional settings generate some common hunter-gatherer traits, but this remains challenging. At one level, foragers can be defined as people who collect rather than cultivate food, and who also valorize this food collecting as a laudable lifestyle. But even this simple definition is complicated by the fact that many of these forager groups gather food not to just consume it locally, but also to exchange it with outsiders for grown food. This is certainly not a new phenomenon, and ongoing genetic, linguistic, and archaeological work across the region indicates that these kinds of forager-farmer contacts are highly complex and probably of considerable antiquity, but this important topic needs much more research. Related debates have questioned whether foragers can actually maintain viable settlement in the region's tropical forests without access to supplementary carbohydrate sources, which only local horticulturalists can provide, generally in exchange for products gathered from the forests. As noted above for many African groups, if long-term occupation of tropical forests requires interaction with farmers, then foragers could only begin to move into and settle these ecosystems if they had reliable exchange networks linking them to farmers. This would suggest a situation of mutual interdependency from the outset. If so, can these groups really constitute genuine and 'authentic' foragers, and if yes, how best to classify and understand them?

As hunter-gatherer research expanded and diversified in the wake of the 1980s Kalahari Debate, the foragers of South-East Asia have become increasingly important examples of modern hunter-gatherers who provide a sustained critique to Eurocentric notions of 'pure' hunter-gatherers. They also serve to highlight the historical contingency of many foraging adaptations, as well as the importance of culture-contact and the widespread management of wild resources. Increasingly, these groups are seen as forager-*bricoleurs*,

possessing the ability to create sustainable composite economies that they can adjust quickly with great flexibility and skill, a capacity that is important in regions increasingly characterized by resource-depleted environments. Often, these highly flexible strategies are not commercially motivated—trade is for subsistence, but not necessarily to maximize profit. Much more research is needed to understand better these relations between local cultures and diverse outsiders, and development and conservation work is also needed to ensure they retain access to protected areas of traditional resources. Broadly similar patterns to these (p. 912) identified in South-East Asia can also be noted in the study of hunter-gatherers from southern Asia (see Morrison and Junker 2002).

Alternative Pathways to Foraging in South America

Politis and Hernando also highlight the historical contingency of foraging patterns in their review of research into South America's numerous hunting and gathering communities, who over recent centuries inhabited a strikingly wide range of environments, exhibiting a remarkable degree of cultural and linguistic diversity. One overarching theme relevant to the study of all these groups is the fundamental disruption to older lifeways and cultural patterns caused by European colonialism. In some areas, earlier forager populations have now disappeared due to encroaching agricultural settlement and forced assimilation programmes. In other areas, some remoter groups remain in the most minimal contacts with outsiders, demonstrating that hunter-gatherer lifeways remain culturally and ecologically viable, even into the twenty-first century.

Perhaps the greatest paradox in South American hunter-gatherer research is that many modern hunter-gatherer groups appear to be relatively 'new' foragers. That is, the current practice of foraging does not form an older and relatively unchanged mode of existence that has persisted through from prehistory, but is a specific way of life that appeared quite recently, forming part of a widespread historical transformation away from the widespread horticultural economies that existed across the continent prior to European contact. Therefore, in many parts of South America, foraging forms a secondary *re-adaptation* to the new cultural, ecological, and political contexts generated by colonial dislocations. Understanding these local historical trajectories is important in hunter-gatherer research more generally, because they provide a fundamental empirical challenge to what are often assumed to represent 'logical' sequences of social evolutionary development.

Once cast as a cultural 'regression', this recent switch to foraging, along with the remote areas occupied by many groups, and their generally egalitarian social structures, are now widely regarded as evidence for deliberate political action, all of which was structured by the need for local responses to the painful colonial history of the continent. For those interested in the historically contingent dynamics of culture-contact, these unique 'pathways' to hunting and gathering make the study of the continent's diverse forager groups particularly insightful. Also interesting are the blurred lines between food procurement and food production strategies exhibited by some groups. Many practise highly sophisticated plant management strategies, often leading to the cumulative transformation of the

forested ecosystem over many generations, confounding the assumption that foragers rely only on 'wild' resources and inhabit 'natural' environments.

Hunter-Gatherers and the Ethnohistory of Northern Eurasia

The final two chapters focus on examining the historical experiences of hunting and gathering groups living at opposite ends of Eurasia—the Ainu of North-East Asia and the Forest (p. 913) Saami of northern Europe. The ecological patterns, economic strategies, culture-contact dynamics, and historical transformations identified by these two chapters also reflect the wider indigenous histories of northern Siberia (Forsyth 1992). By 1500 AD, the various hunting, fishing, and gathering cultures living right across northern Eurasia had already been in different forms of culture-contact with more southerly states and empires for centuries if not millennia.

As these contacts intensified, these northern groups became caught up in a series of shared historical transformations, which involved balancing the emergence of increasingly commercialized hunting economies that were orientated towards fulfilling external tax and trade obligations, with also meeting the needs of local subsistence (Jordan 2010). Other important historical developments taking place during these centuries include the increasing reach of colonial settlement, commercialization of coastal and river fishing, and what appears to be the sudden and apparently simultaneous rise of large-scale reindeer pastoralism among indigenous groups living across the wider region (Krupnik 1993).

The Ainu

Hudson's chapter focuses on the Ainu, who originally inhabited Hokkaido, southern parts of Sakhalin Island, and the Kuril Islands. For various reasons, the Ainu have been the focus of intense international anthropological interest. As hunter-gatherer studies coalesced in the mid-twentieth century, ethnographic information about northern hemisphere hunter-gatherers was primarily drawn from New World sources. The Ainu of Japan were presented as a unique example of an Old World cold temperate foraging society that continued to engage in hunting, fishing, and gathering until relatively recently. For example, the *Man the hunter* (Lee and DeVore 1968) volume contained a chapter on the Ainu, which presented a rather timeless and ahistorical study of forager adaptations to the local ecology (Watanabe 1968). In contrast, examples of similar northern hunter-gatherer cultures from Siberia were bypassed by these debates due to perceived problems with culture-contact, Soviet collectivization, and the uptake of reindeer pastoralism (Murdoch 1968).

In reality, Ainu history is also very complex, as Hudson examines. For example, for many centuries the Ainu combined hunting, fishing, and gathering, with participation in maritime trade networks, and also undertook widespread plant cultivation. Ainu groups were particularly impacted by the incorporation of Hokkaido into the Japanese state in 1870,

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and by large-scale agricultural settlement of the island by migrants from the south. This coincided with bans on traditional Ainu subsistence and forced assimilation programmes. As a result of these sudden transformations, there was never time for developing a tradition of doing primary ethnographic work. Most ethnographic sources are based on a few elders' recollections of life in earlier times, and this has resulted in Ainu culture being presented in rather timeless, uniform, and descriptive ways. In fact, there was important regional variability in language and culture, and significant changes through time. These deeper historical patterns in Ainu culture are now seeing renewed attention from local archaeologists, historians, linguistics geneticists, and indeed representatives of contemporary Ainu organizations, and it remains unclear as to how the modern Ainu relate to older populations and archaeological cultures both within the Japanese archipelago and across the wider region. Hudson argues, in particular, that the extended and highly detailed ethnohistoric record associated (p. 914) with the Ainu represents a unique opportunity to study the effects of culture-contact on hunter-gatherers over extremely long time periods.

Ainu ethnographic materials have made other long-term contributions to hunter-gatherer studies, for example, emphasizing the central importance of ritual and world view in northern hunting economies. These more religious and spiritual dimensions of hunter-gatherer existence have often been overlooked in more ecologically orientated research, which focuses primarily on studying adaptation and subsistence strategies. Accounts of the elaborate Ainu bear festival have been particularly important, and although the bear is venerated across the circumpolar region, the festivals among the Ainu (and a few other groups in the Russian Far East) are rather unique in that they involve the capture and rearing of *live* animals before their eventual consumption as part of special rituals. These accounts also generate some useful insights into the range of possible motivations for the capture and rearing of wild animals by foragers for later use in competitive feasting events, a process touched upon by Hayden (in Part IV) in his discussion of socio-political dynamics typical of many trans-egalitarian hunter-gatherers.

The Forest Saami

Taavitsainen shifts the focus westwards, across the Eurasian continent, to analyse the more recent past of the Forest Saami. These groups of northern hunter-fisher-gatherers inhabited the boreal forest zone of Fennoscandia, and by 1500 AD, had already been in various forms of culture-contact with surrounding agricultural groups, chiefdoms, early states, and empires for several centuries. Understanding the final stages in the history of these 'last' European foragers has never really been linked to debates within the wider field of hunter-gatherer studies, but has tended to be subsumed into broader analysis of the region's numerous and interlocking ethnic and national histories. In much of this research, widespread use is made of the rich ethnohistoric archives associated with the Saami and other groups living in the region, most of which is derived from early tax and settlement records. As such, Taavitsainen's chapter is therefore not a critical review of hunter-gatherer scholarship in this region because there has never really been such a body of work. Instead, he presents a historically situated analysis of the profound challenges and possible cultural and ethnic survival strategies that confronted the Forest Saa-

mi in the context of the declining fur trade, encroachment by logging industries, settlement of their lands by incoming Finnish farmers, and the wider take-off of nomadic reindeer pastoralism among other groups further to the north. The European case study is important because it highlights the range of options that open up to northern hunter-fisher-gatherers within the challenges associated with later historical stages of culture contact.

Siberian Hunter-Gatherers

Both the Ainu and Saami chapters represent interesting examples of northern hunter-fisher-gatherers being drawn into long-term culture-contact with encroaching states and empires. The particular patterns identified by Hudson and Taavitsainen bear striking similarity to the historical fate of other hunter-fisher-gatherer groups living across adjacent areas of northern Russia and into Siberia as they became caught up in the expanding fur (p. 915) trade. However, hunter-gatherer research in Siberia has its own unique history of research, and for many decades was isolated from international debates, especially during the key *Man the hunter* era in the mid-twentieth century (Schweitzer 2000). For example, cultural ecology had little impact on the ethnographic research conducted in the Soviet Union on its northern peoples (Krupnik 1993), and Western scholars generally assumed that all Siberian foragers had either been collectivized, switched subsistence, or been assimilated, rendering attempts at further fieldwork rather redundant (Murdoch 1968).

The end of the Cold War opened up scope for more internationalized research into Siberia hunter-gatherers. There is an extensive Russian language ethnographic literature, highly detailed historical archives about northern populations extending back to the seventeenth century, and numerous opportunities for further fieldwork in the region. Renewed attention to these research opportunities would serve to integrate these diverse northern groups more effectively into international hunter-gatherer scholarship and debate, and important progress in this direction is now being made on several fronts (Anderson 2011; Jordan 2010; Schweitzer 2000; Sirina 2004).

Discussion and Conclusion

The chapters in this part highlight the enormous breadth and sheer scale of research effort that has been directed at understanding modern and recent hunting and gathering groups occupying a wide range of world regions. The chapters also provide a critical review of the most important debates and research directions that have structured this highly regionalized hunter-gatherer scholarship. Broadly similar global trends are reflected in basic data collection, and most of these areas have extensive historical archives generated by early phases of culture-contact and colonialism, followed only later by more detailed and professionalized anthropological field studies. Opportunities for further ethnographic fieldwork into communities still relying on foraging for the bulk of their

subsistence needs are in long-term decline, and many groups are becoming increasingly assimilated into wider regional networks.

Several future research directions emerge. In many world regions, further ethnographic fieldwork remains possible and will be important to generate basic descriptions of some of the groups living in remoter areas of South America and in tropical Africa. Many study regions have also been largely dominated by ecologically orientated research, and more fieldwork could be done to broaden these themes and generate other insights, particularly into the social and ideological dimensions of modern forager lifeways. The importance of advocacy, community engagement, and making academic research more locally relevant also emerge as ongoing challenges for research into forager groups living in a rapidly changing world.

As emphasis has shifted away from attempts to identify the relatively timeless features and cross-cultural patterns associated with the last of the 'pure' hunter-gatherers, all modern foragers are now generally viewed within their wider regional and historical settings. Further analysis of the extensive ethnohistorical archives associated with many groups and regions represents an enormous research opportunity. Future research topics, especially in the Old World, might include understanding better the role of foragers in long-term culture- (p. 916) contact, especially in northern Europe, across Siberia, and indeed in Japan, where highly detailed archival sources on tax, trade, and other themes extend back over many centuries.

Archaeological, genetic, linguistic, and palaeoecological data are also making increasingly important contributions to the reconstructions of these long-term hunter-gatherer histories, and many interpretations are now starting to highlight the flexibility and dynamism of hunter-gatherer societies across both prehistoric and also more recent historic periods. These kinds of detailed, long-term insights are also important for 'descendant communities' as they seek to understand their own identities and cultural histories, as well as to meet challenges associated with contemporary socio-economic and environmental situations.

Broader archaeological engagements with these hunter-gatherer ethnographic insights are also changing. If in the past, ethnographic accounts of modern foragers were applied in a relatively straightforward and simplistic manner to the interpretation of prehistoric datasets, now archaeologists are much more critically aware of the highly contextual nature of all ethnographic information. Increasingly knowledgeable about the historical contingency of all ethnographic data, as well as the universal implications of culture-contact, archaeologists are now better equipped to appreciate the flexibility and cultural resilience of prehistoric hunter-gatherer societies. Understanding better the variability and range of cultural strategies potentially open to prehistoric hunter-gatherers as they came into contact with other groups can generate fresh perspectives on the dynamism of forager-farmer contact zones and other kinds of inter-cultural encounter. Certainly, the 'agency' of hunter-gatherers in major historical transformations such as the transition to farming is being fundamentally reassessed, partly through applications of ethnographic

models. In Europe, the transition is now regarded as a much more contingent and regionally variable process than the kind of monolithic expansion of agricultural populations at the expense of foragers, as had hitherto been the case (see Part V).

To conclude, there remains an intense and enduring interest in the world's recently documented hunter-gatherer societies, both among anthropologists and especially archaeologists, but also increasingly among members of indigenous communities, policy-makers, and the wider public. Understanding how ethnographic and historical information about hunter-gatherers has been generated and interpreted in different world regions is an important goal for this part of the handbook. Increasingly, variability among modern hunter-gatherer cultures is now viewed as the being the outcome of long-term processes, which involve the reproduction of deeper traditions alongside more recent adjustments and innovations associated with both specific ecological and historical contexts.

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