

Leverhulme Trust Emeritus Fellowship - Annual Report

EM-2018-057: Nuaulu ethnobotanical cognition and knowledge (Seram, eastern Indonesia)

1. Summary of research

The objective of the fellowship was to complete and submit for publication a major piece of work on Nuaulu ethnobotanical classification that at the same time evaluated the current state of our knowledge on how the folk classification of plants works cross-culturally. In support of this I indicated that I would also be updating the main database for this project (the NED: Nuaulu Ethnobotanical Database) using new and revised identifications and data associated with the preparation of Nuaulu plant specimens housed in the University of Kent Ethnobiology Laboratory.

A proposal for a book entitled *The Nuaulu world of plants: Ethnobotanical cognition, knowledge and practice among a people of Seram, eastern Indonesia* was submitted during May 2019 to the Royal Anthropological Institute, with a view to it appearing in the RAI monograph series published by Sean Kingston. The proposal was accepted by the RAI Publications Committee on 1 June. The full manuscript will be submitted in September for review. It is anticipated that there will be a decision by the end of 2019.

The Nuaulu world of plants builds upon anthropological fieldwork spread over a period of 50 years, as well as theoretical enquiries around the fundamental bases of human classificatory activity through the study of ethnobiological knowledge more generally. The book assesses the current state of classification theory, particularly the relationship between so-called 'natural' (general-purpose) classifications and use-based (special-purpose) schemes, and the social distribution of knowledge in relation to sharing and specialisation. I argue that recent work looking at ontologies and epistemologies for studying ethnobiological knowledge systems, specifically those focussing on 'convergence metaphysics', while compliant with the critique of the 'new normal' advocated in my earlier work, present new challenges that must be addressed.

The chapter headings are as follows: 1. Introduction; 2. How Nuaulu experience and cognize their plant world; 3. Ferns and their allies; 4. Villages, swiddens and fallows; 5. Trees, lianas and forest; 6. Pandans, bamboos and palms in their habitats; 7. Shrubs, herbs and utilitarian groups; 8. The correspondence between Nuaulu plant names, categories and scientific taxa; 9. Plant knowledge and time; 10. Rethinking ethnobotanical classification; 11. Nuaulu ethnobotany and theories of cultural cognition. The appendices include: (1) a list of plant taxa and supporting vouchers for Nuaulu plant terms discussed in the text, arranged phylogenetically; (2) alphabetical indexes of Nuaulu plant names with scientific identification and of scientific plant taxa with Nuaulu names; and (3) the results of eleven plot surveys of Nuaulu forest undertaken in 1996.

In support of this the Nuaulu plant specimens at Kent have been mounted on herbarium sheets or placed in spirit jars or carpological boxes with temporary printed labels. This has enabled the updating of identifications and quantitative data contained in the manuscript. However, the final check will take place while the manuscript is being reviewed. Assuming the manuscript is accepted for publication, the final update will take place during the revision period, before the manuscript goes into production. During that period also the final labels for

the Nuaulu collection will be completed making the resource accessible to other potential users.

2. Output

As stated above, the monograph will be submitted for review during September 2019. It will comprise approximately 200,000 words and include 56 tables, 55 figures, of which 3 are maps, 35 line-art and 17 half-tone plates.

The project website is up-and-running (<https://research.kent.ac.uk/nuaulu/>), though at present with little content. Publications, reports, photographs and the Nuaulu Ethnobotanical Database (NED) will be added during the course of the next 12 months.

The following papers have been published on matters directly connected with the Fellowship:

- 2018. Comment on 'Revamping the metaphysics of ethnobiological classification' by David Ludwig. *Current Anthropology* 59 (4), 424-426.
- 2019. Transmitting symbolic concepts from the perspective of cultural cognition - the acquisition and transfer of folk-biological knowledge. In *Finding, inheriting or borrowing? The construction and transfer of knowledge in antiquity and the middle ages*, eds., J. Althoff, D. Berrens and T. Pommerening. [Mainz Historical Cultural Sciences, 39]. Bielefeld: Transcript Verlag, pp. 41-70.
- 2019. Ritual, landscapes of exchange, and the domestication of *Canarium*: a Seram case study. *Asian Perspectives*. 58 (2), 1-26.

In addition the following publications have appeared which, while not directly connected with the project, are indirectly connected by being on Nuaulu ethnography and representing a significant amount of research effort:

- 2018. *Kinship, population and social reproduction in the 'new Indonesia': a study of Nuaulu cultural resilience*. Abingdon UK, New York: Routledge.
- 2018. Cultural adaptation (v3 1282-1288), Ecological Anthropology (v4 1705-1707), Ethnobiology (v4: 1977-1980), Ethnoscience (v4: 2086-2087), Firth, Raymond (1901-2002) (v5: 2304-2307), Regional systems (v9: 5059-5061), Settlement patterns (v10: 5422-5423), *The International Encyclopedia of Anthropology*, ed. Hilary Callan. Oxford: Wiley Blackwell.
- 2018. The impact of local networks on subsistence resilience and biodiversity in a low-lying Moluccan reef system between 1600 and the present. *Ambio*. Published online 05 September 2018, DOI 10.1007/s13280-018-1091-2.
- 2018. (with Paul Dresch). John Horsley Russell Davis, 9 September 1938 - 15 January 2017. *Biographical Memoirs of Fellows of the British Academy*, XVII, 121-143.
- 2019. Pottery Production and Trade in the Banda Zone, Indonesia, *Indonesia and the Malay World*, DOI: [10.1080/13639811.2019.1582862](https://doi.org/10.1080/13639811.2019.1582862)
- 2019. Understanding geometrical features of Nuaulu shield design. *Journal of Material Culture* 24 (2), 210-231. Published online 10 October 2018, <https://doi.org/10.1177/1359183518803393>
- 2019. Contrasting acoustical signatures and the power in ritual: Nuaulu spirit healing in the Moluccan islands. In *Hearing Southeast Asia: sounds of hierarchy and power in context* (ed.) N. Porath, 174-201. Copenhagen: NIAS Press.

3. Activities

I have given the following papers during the grant period on subjects germane to the theme of the fellowship:

- 2018 Seeds versus vegetative propagules as strategies for surviving the Anthropocene: social profiles and biocultural consequences, presentation at 'Seedways: the dispersal, evolution and commodification of seeds and plants in a warming world', a symposium held at the Royal Academy of Letters, History and Antiquities, Stockholm, November 14-15.
- 2018 Ritual, 'landscapes of exchange' and the domestication of *Canarium*: a Seram case study', a lecture presented at: 'L'ethnoscience aujourd'hui: colloque en l'honneur de Claudine Friedberg', held in la Grande Galerie de l'Evolution, Museum National d'Histoire Naturelle, Paris, 16 November.
- 2019 The ethnobotany of culturally salient polymorphisms in *Codiaeum variegatum* and Nuauulu symbolic practices, presentation at the Society of Ethnobiology conference, University of British Columbia, Vancouver, 8-12 May.

The first two were covered by grants from the organizers of the events concerned, and both papers are in the publication pipeline. Attendance at the third event was made possible by the Leverhulme Fellowship.

4. Interim statement of expenditure

A financial statement accompanies this report as a separate file. The pattern of expenditure is more-or-less as planned, though I have probably underspent in terms of the projected budget in the first year. Much of the RA input will now fall in the second year, and of course the publishing subvention can only be transferred once I have a contract for the manuscript.

The largest item of expenditure has been to enable Ms Mercy Morris to prepare the specimens to archival standard, produce temporary labels, undertake some photography for figures that will appear in the monograph, and assist in IT matters relating to the NED, and relating to production of tables and figures that will appear in the monograph. Maps have been produced by the Kent Design and Print Centre, and additional photography undertaken by the British Museum.

One (overseas) conference has been paid for by the grant. A further conference presentation is anticipated, most likely the Annual Conference of the RAI (to be jointly sponsored with the Royal Geographical Society) on 'Anthropology and Geography: Dialogues Past, Present and Future' to be held at the British Museum, 4-7 June 2020.

In retrospect, I would appear to have underestimated the RA costs, and possibly the costs associated with the publication subvention. With a view to viring additional funds from other underspent headings I contacted Anna Grundy 10 June 2019 with a request. The proposed virement was agreed with Bridget Kerr on 12 June 2019.

Roy Ellen, 21 August 2019