

Leverhulme Trust Emeritus Fellowship - Annual Report 2020

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.

The full manuscript of *The Nuaulu World of Plants: Ethnobotanical Cognition, Knowledge and Practice Among a People of Seram, Eastern Indonesia* was submitted during September 2019 to the Royal Anthropological Institute Publications Committee, with a view to it appearing in the RAI monograph series published by Sean Kingston. The manuscript was accepted by the Committee during the Autumn of 2019 after review, and a contract signed with Sean Kingston on 11 November 2019. Between December 2019 and April 2020 the manuscript was revised in conjunction with feedback from Sean Kingston and submitted for production on 1 May 2020. The current plan is for copyediting to be completed during August, with proofing late Autumn with a view to publication by the end of 2020 so that the volume can be included as part of the University of Kent REF submission in Anthropology.

As I noted in the 2019 Annual Report, *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.

During the 2019-2020 revision process the arrangement of chapters has changed slightly and is now as follows: 1 Introduction; 2. How Nuaulu experience and talk about their plant world; 3. From words to categories: ferns and their allies; 4. Villages, swiddens and fallows; 5. Trees, lianas and forest; 6. Pandans, palms and bamboos; 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; and 11. Nuaulu ethnobotany and theories of cultural cognition. The arrangement of appendices remains unchanged and includes: 1. List of plant taxa and supporting vouchers for Nuaulu plant terms discussed in the text, arranged phylogenetically; 2. Alphabetical index of Nuaulu plant names with scientific identifications; 3 Alphabetical index of scientific plant taxa with Nuaulu names; 4 The results of eleven plot surveys of Nuaulu forest undertaken in 1996; and 5. Abbreviations and conventions used in text and appendices

In support of the monograph, work on the Nuauulu plant specimens at Kent has continued. Between August 2019 and March 2020 the work on mounting specimens on herbarium sheets or placing them in spirit jars or carpological boxes with temporary printed labels was completed. This has enabled the updating of identifications and quantitative data contained in the manuscript. The original plan was that during this period also the final labels for the Nuauulu collection would be completed and the sheets, spirit jars and carpological boxes prepared to archive standard. Unfortunately, the Covid-19 lockdown prevented access to the collection between March and August 2020. Ms Morris has been able to undertake some work on the labels from home, and it is hoped that with the opening of some labs during August 2020 the work on the specimens will be completed by 30 December 2020.

Related to this project has been work on a collection of essays under the title *Nature Wars: Essays Around a Contested Concept*. A contract was signed on 14 January 2020 and the work is currently in production. It is due to be published 3 October 2020 by Berghahn.

2. Output

As stated above, the monograph will be published by December 2020. The revised manuscript submitted for production comprises approximately 139,500 words and includes 58 tables, 61 figures, of which 3 are maps, 41 line-art and 15 half-tone plates, some comprising two or more separate images.

The project website has been recently updated (<https://research.kent.ac.uk/nuauulu/>). In addition to a description of the project, it currently hosts a list of publications and reports arising from the project. Discussions are in progress with technical support staff at Kent on how best to upload and make accessible the Nuauulu Ethnobotanical Database (NED). It is hoped that this will be added during the course of the next 12 months, together with a representative sample of photographs.

The following papers have been submitted for publication since August 2019 on matters directly connected with the Fellowship:

To the *Journal of Ethnobiology*: The ethnobotany of culturally salient polymorphisms in *Codiaeum variegatum* and Nuauulu symbolic practices.

To the *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute*: Learning technical practices in UK home gardens: ‘traditional’ knowledge in a complex society

The following chapters have been commissioned and submitted, or are currently in press awaiting publication:

Thinking through nostalgia in anthropologies of the environment and ethnographies of landscape. In *Ecological Nostalgias: Memory, Affect and Creativity in Times of Ecological Upheavals*, Olivia Angé and David Berliner (eds). London: Berghahn.

Seeds versus vegetative propagules as strategies for surviving the Anthropocene: social profiles and biocultural consequences. In *Seedways*, Anniko Rabo and Beppe Karlsson (eds). Stockholm: The Royal Swedish Academy of Letters, History and Antiquities.

Cultivar diversity and management. In *Routledge Handbook of Indigenous Environmental Knowledge*, Shonil Bhagwat and Tom Thornton (eds). London: Routledge.

The category *kasituri*, Nuauulu biological nomenclature, and language contact in the Malay

trading system. In M. Roue, and S. Laligant (eds), *Festschrift in Honour of Claudine Friedberg*. Paris: Museum National d'Histoire Naturelle.

Lines in a landscape: what networks of bamboo water conduits tell us about how Nuauulu conceptualise their environment. In *Collecting Human–Environment Relations An Ecological Approach to Material Culture in Oceania*, S. Belharte and C. Kocher Schmid (eds). Canberra: ANU Press, Asia-Pacific Environment Monographs Series.

In addition the following publications have appeared which, while not directly connected with the project, are indirectly connected by being completed in the context of the Leverhulme Fellowship:

(with A. Muthana). 2020. The great eolith debate and the Anthropological Institute. *Bulletin of the History of Archaeology* 30(1): 4, 1–11. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.5334/bha-623>

3. Activities

I presented the following paper:

27 January 2020, 'Ritual, 'landscapes of exchange' and the domestication of Canarium: a Seram case study', at the MacDonald Institute, University of Cambridge.

The cost was covered by the organizers of the event concerned. The publication is now published, reported in last year's annual report and attached here.

A paper proposal for a panel on 'orphan ethnobotanical collections' was accepted for the RAI conference to be held at the British Museum, 4-7 June 2020 (jointly sponsored with the Royal Geographical Society) on 'Anthropology and Geography: Dialogues Past, Present and Future'.

With the cancellation of this event due to the Covid-19 lockdown, the submitted fees were reimbursed to the project. The RAI has now re-scheduled a virtual conference for September, although the organizers of the panel, after consulting with participants, decided not to re-instate it. I shall continue to look for suitable conferences at which to present outputs from the project. If there is nothing suitable, the allocated funds will be absorbed into the costs of preparing the NED for publication.

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 until March 2020. Most of the work on bringing *The Nuauulu World of Plants* to publication has continued un-hindered by the Covid-19 Lockdown, but all work on the herbarium specimens in the Ethnobiology Lab came to a halt, as did plans for conference papers. In the circumstances I requested a grant extension until August 2021, which was approved 6 May 2020. Most of the remaining RA input will now fall between August and December 2020. The largest single payment in the course of last year was the publication subvention to Sean Kingston of £4000 (to which the RAI contributed an additional £2000) and the costs of employing Ms Mercy Morris as RA.

Maps have been produced by the Kent Design and Print Centre, and additional photography undertaken by the British Museum and the Linnean Society of London. As predicted in the

original grant application, there were also the costs of acquiring permission to reproduce material from other copyright holders. The remaining costs were mainly herbarium supplies and computer-related expenses. Fees paid to the RAI in relation to the cancelled conference have been refunded.

Roy Ellen, 5 August 2020