

# Anthropology of Sustainability (Preview)

Marc Brightman & Jerome Lewis

2 August 2017

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Series Editors

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Our series aims to bring together research on the social, behavioral, and cultural dimensions of sustainability: on local and global understandings of the concept and on lived practices around the world. It publishes studies which use ethnography to help us understand emerging ways of living, acting, and thinking sustainably. The books in this series also investigate and shed light on the political dynamics of resource governance and various scientific cultures of sustainability.

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[Title Page]

Marc Brightman • Jerome Lewis

Editors

The Anthropology of Sustainability  
Beyond Development and Progress

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## Preface

The Centre for the Anthropology of Sustainability (CAoS), based in the Department of Anthropology at UCL, promotes research, discussion and publications that take the dream of sustainability seriously and, most importantly, that search and struggle for alternatives. CAoS was launched with a conference in 2015, ‘Anthropological Visions of Sustainable Futures’, that brought together a group of eminent colleagues to discuss the insights our discipline can contribute to the concept of ‘sustainability’, and conversely to consider the consequences of applying the idea of sustainability to our discipline and its distinctive core methodology: ethnography. In addition to two days of plenary presentations followed by lively commentary from invited discussants, the conference hosted Marcus Coates, an artist whose work offers a multispecies commentary on aspects of the human condition, and presented a sell-out performance of the play ‘Gaia Global Circus’ conceived by Bruno Latour, written by Pierre Daubigny, and directed

by Frédérique Aït-Touati and Chloe Latour, contemplating what climate change and the Anthropocene mean for humanity.

The results of this gathering exceeded our expectations. The presentations and ensuing discussions offered profound insights into what the notoriously ambiguous and politically manipulated term ‘sustainability’ means; of what needs to be sustained to ensure future livability; of the value of ethnography for understanding what living sustainably means in practice for human societies, and what it does not; of the emerging academic significance of anthropology in the Anthropocene; and of the ethical-cum-political duty of anthropologists to fight more forcefully for diversity so as to secure a livable future for humans and non-humans in the ecologically nested systems we share. This volume makes these surprisingly convergent insights available to a wider audience.

We are immensely grateful to all of the discussants at the CAoS conference whose thoughtful and provocative reflections helped further inspire the editors and contributors to this volume: Olivia Angé, Laura Bear, Phil Burnham, Carolina Commandulli, Gill Conquest, Phillippe Descola, Pablo Dominguez, Keith Hart, Evan Killick, Hannah Knox, Ellen Potts, AnneChristine Taylor, Cathryn Townsend, Olga Ulturgasheva and Cédric Yvinec. We wish to thank Haidy Geismar, Vanessa Grotti, Martin Holbraad, Katherine Homewood and Hannah Knox for their comments on the text. Special thanks are due to Paul Carter-Bowman, Hernando Echeverri, and Cathryn Townsend for their help organizing the event. We also gratefully acknowledge the generous support of the Faculty of Social and Historical Sciences and the Joint Faculty Institute of Graduate Studies at UCL, the Institut Français de Londres, the Royal Anthropological Institute, and the Association of Social Anthropologists. This book is dedicated to the memory of Gill Conquest, an extraordinary person, exceptional student and polymath who helped us to build CAoS from its earliest days.

London, UK

2017

Marc Brightman

Jerome Lewis



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## Note on Contributors

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**Frédérique Aït-Touati** is the director of the Experimental Programme in Arts and Politics at Sciences Po Paris (SPEAP), a theatre director and a researcher at the CNRS and EHESS. The main focus of her research is the relationship between fiction and knowledge. She has directed plays and performances including Gaia Global Circus and The Theatre of Negotiations/Make It Work, a simulation of an international conference on climate change, in collaboration with Bruno Latour. She is the author of Fictions of the Cosmos, Science and Literature in the Seventeenth Century (Chicago, 2011). Her current book project, entitled Performing knowledge, explores the relationship between cultures of performance and cultures of knowledge from the early modern period to the present.

**Mauro Almeida** was born in Acre, Brazil, and obtained his PhD in Social Anthropology at the University of Cambridge. He is associate professor at the Campinas State University (retired), where he is a member of the Centre for Rural Studies (CERES). He has field experience in Amazonia (on rubber tappers, mixed-blood Amazonians) and does research on the boundaries between traditional knowledge and scientific knowledge. His publications include the *A enciclope´dia da floresta. O Alto Jurua: pratica e conhecimentos das populações* (The Forest Encyclopedia. Upper Jurua: practices and knowledge of inhabitants), co-authored with Manuela Carneiro da Cunha.

**Marc Brightman** is Lecturer in Social and Environmental Sustainability in the Department of Anthropology, University College London. He has carried out research among Carib-speaking peoples (Trio, Wayana and Akuriyo) of north-eastern Amazonia (Suriname and French Guiana) on leadership, property relations, and perspectives on environmental conservation, and has studied forest governance and the ‘greening’ of development, focusing on the UN-REDD ‘readiness’ programme. His current project explores the role of migrants in agriculture in southern Italy. His most recent book is *The Imbalance of Power: Leadership, Masculinity and Wealth in Amazonia* (Berghahn Books, 2016).

**Manuela Carneiro da Cunha** is professor emerita of Anthropology at the University of Chicago as well as the University of Sao Paulo. In 2011–2012, she was visiting chair at the Collège de France. She has carried out research on historical anthropology, on emancipated West African slaves and ethnicity, on indigenous history and land rights in Brazil, and on traditional people’s knowledge and intellectual rights. She is a member of the Brazilian Academy of Sciences.



**Marcus Coates** was born in 1968 in London, UK. In 2008, he was the recipient of a Paul Hamlyn Award, and in 2009, he won the Daiwa Art Prize. His solo exhibitions include *The Trip*, Serpentine Gallery, London; *Implicit Sound*, Fundació Joan Miró, Barcelona; *Psychopomp*, Milton Keynes Gallery and *Marcus Coates*, Kunsthalle, Zurich, Switzerland. Group exhibitions include *Private Utopia: Contemporary Art from the British Council Collection*, Tokyo Station Gallery, Japan; *Station to Station*, Barbican Art Centre, London; *THE BEAUTY OF DISTANCE: Songs of Survival in a Precarious Age*, Sydney Biennale, Australia; *ALTERMODERN*, Tate Triennial, Tate Britain, London; *MANIFESTA 7*, Trento, Italy; *Transformation*, Museum of Contemporary Art, Tokyo; *Laughing in a Foreign Language*, Hayward Gallery, London; *Hamsterwheel*, Malmo Konsthall, Sweden and Venice Biennale. A retrospective book, *Marcus Coates* (2016), commissioned by Kunsthalle Zurich and Milton Keynes Gallery, is published by Koenig. Marcus Coates lives and works in London.

**Arturo Escobar** is Professor of Anthropology at the University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill, and research associate with the Culture, Memory, and Nation group at Universidad del Valle, Cali. His main interests are political ecology, ontological design, and the anthropology of development, social movements, and technoscience. Over the past 25 years, he has worked closely with several Afro-Colombian social movements in the Colombian Pacific, in particular the Process of Black Communities (PCN). His most well-known book is *Encountering Development: The Making and Unmaking of the Third World* (1995, 2nd ed. 2011). His most recent book is *Sentipensar con la Tierra. Nuevas lecturas sobre desarrollo, territorio y diferencia* (2014).

**James Fairhead** is Professor of Social Anthropology at the University of Sussex. He has researched on environmental and medical questions in Central and West Africa since the 1980s, and more latterly on the history of the region and of anthropology itself. He is author of many works including *Misreading the African Landscape* (CUP 1996), *Reframing Deforestation* (Routledge 1998), *Science Society and Power* (CUP 2003), *Vaccine Anxieties* (Routledge 2007) and *The Captain and the Cannibal* (Yale, 2015). During the Ebola crisis he helped found the Ebola Response Anthropology Platform that provided social, cultural, and political analysis to the medical response.

**Kirsten Hastrup** is Professor of Anthropology at the University of Copenhagen. In recent years she has worked with a hunting community in Northwest Greenland, studying the changes in climate and community. Earlier, she worked in Iceland and published three monographs on its long-term history, natural and social. An overall thematic interest in her work is the co-constitution of nature and society, which points far beyond 'the local'. From 2009 to 2014, she held an ERC Advanced Grant; the project, *Waterworlds*, studied water-related challenges to diverse communities across the globe. Among her recent books are the edited volumes on *Anthropology and Nature* (2014), and *Waterworlds: Anthropology in Fluid Environments* (2016, co-edited with Frida Hastrup).

**Katherine M. Homewood** studied Zoology at Oxford University and gained her PhD in Anthropology at the University of London. After working at the University of

Dar es Salaam in Tanzania, she joined UCL as Lecturer and Tutor in Human Sciences, an interdisciplinary and interdepartmental degree. She is now Professor in Anthropology at UCL. Her work centres on the interaction of conservation and development in sub-Saharan Africa, with a special focus on pastoralist peoples in drylands, among other groups and ecosystems. She researches the implications of natural resource policies and management for local people's livelihoods and welfare, and the implications of changing land use for environment and biodiversity. Her Human Ecology Research Group integrates natural and social sciences approaches to interactions of environment and development around the global South.

**Alf Hornborg** is Professor of Human Ecology, Lund University, Lund, Sweden. He is the author of *The Power of the Machine* (AltaMira, 2001), *Global Ecology and Unequal Exchange* (Routledge, 2013), and *Global Magic* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2016) and editor of *Rethinking Environmental History* (AltaMira, 2007), *The World System and the Earth System* (Left Coast Press, 2007), *Ethnicity in Ancient Amazonia* (University of Colorado Press, 2011), and *Ecology and Power* (Routledge, 2012). His research interests include economic anthropology, environmental history, political ecology, and ecological economics.

**Signe Howell** is Professor Emeritus of Social Anthropology at the University of Oslo. She has undertaken extensive field work with Chewong, a hunting-gathering, shifting-cultivating group in Peninsular Malaysia, and with Lio people in Eastern Indonesia. More recently, she has been engaged in a study of the implementation of the global REDD initiative (Reducing Emission from Deforestation and Forest Degradation) in tropical forest countries, especially in Indonesia. She has published extensively on topics ranging from cosmology, ritual, kinship, and gender, to environmental ideologies and practices.

**Bruno Latour** is Professor at Sciences Po Paris, Director of the Médialab, of the SPEAP master in political arts and of the FORCCAST project on mapping controversies. Most of his papers and all references may be accessed on his web site [www.bruno-latour.fr](http://www.bruno-latour.fr).

**Jerome Lewis** is Reader in Social Anthropology at University College London. He researches egalitarianism among Central African huntergatherers and other hunter-gatherer societies across the world. After researching the impact of the genocide on Rwanda's Twa he worked with Mbendjele in Congo-Brazzaville on egalitarian politics, forest management, child socialisation, play, religion, language, music and dance. He also studies hunter-gatherers' relations with outsiders and the impact of logging and conservation initiatives on their lifeways. He collaborates with affected hunter-gatherers and other local people through the Extreme Citizen Science Research Group at UCL to support environmental justice ([www.ucl.ac.uk/excites](http://www.ucl.ac.uk/excites)).

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**Laura Rival** is associate professor at Oxford University, where she teaches various courses relating to the anthropology of nature, society, and development. Her research interests include anthropology and interdisciplinarity; Amerindian conceptualizations of nature and society; historical and political ecology; development, conservation and environmental policies in Latin America; sustainability in the Anthropocene; indigenous peoples and theories of human development.

**Veronica Strang** is the Director of Durham University's Institute of Advanced Study and a Professor of Anthropology. Her research focuses on human-environmental relationships, in particular engagements with water. Her publications include *The Meaning of Water* (2004); *Gardening the World: Agency, Identity and the Ownership of Water* (2009), *Ownership and Appropriation* (2010), and *Water: Nature and Culture* (2015). She was one of UNESCO's international *Les Lumières de L'Eau* in 2007, and since 2013 has served as Chair of the Association of Social Anthropologists of the UK and the Commonwealth. She also writes on interdisciplinarity, including *Evaluating Interdisciplinary Research: A Practical Guide* (2015), and *Transforming the Way We Think* (2016).

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