Peripatetic Peoples

The Other Nomads. Peripatetic Minorities in Cross-Cultural Perspective. APARNA RAO, Ed. Böhlau, Cologne, 1987. xiv, 391 pp., illus. DM 96.

The anthropological literature on nomads is focused almost exclusively on pastoralists. The "other nomads," peripatetic peoples who are not pastoralists, are the subject of the present work. Such peripatetics, sometimes called "service nomads," are defined as non–food-producing, endogamous, itinerant peoples who subsist primarily through the sale of goods and the provision of services. They form a small part of many societies the world over. Found at the economic and social margins of society in the United States, Europe, and elsewhere, they are often labeled "Gypsies." In the United States they entertain at carnivals and engage in such occupations as fortune-telling, asphalting driveways, and trafficking in used cars. Peripatetics the world over discover periodic and ephemeral resources, quickly expand to exploit them, and then disperse to search for new resources (Gmelch and Gmelch, p. 135, on Travellers in Britain, and Kaminski, p. 323, on Polish Gypsies, drawing from the work of Lauwagie). Utilizing strategies of spatial mobility, dispersal, extreme minority numbers, specialized individual skills, transportable material resources, knowledge of diverse ecocultural systems, and stigmatization, these people exploit the "peripatetic niche—a demand for specialized services/goods which sedentary communities cannot, or are unwilling to support on a fulltime basis" (Berland, p. 248, on the Kanjar of Pakistan). Some further examples of these occupations are horse-trading, coppersmithing, woodworking, begging, and musical entertaining.

The "other nomads" of this volume differ from such peripatetics as migrant wage laborers and many academics by the nature of their cultures and societies. Although a part of the complex societies to which they provide goods and services, as minorities these groups constitute their own separate subsocieties. They distinguish themselves as unique peoples and utilize such ethnic markers as endogamy, kinship connections, language, religion, and notions of ritual purity to set themselves off from others and to provide themselves some protection. Members of the societies with whom they relate consider these peripatetics outcasts and pariahs and discriminate against, even persecute, them. By their own economic and social strategies, by the exclusionary practices of the host societies, and by the images that they create and that are created by others, these people are not integrated members of the wider societies in which they live and travel.

Some peripatetics have maintained a degree of cultural, social, and linguistic integrity for generations. Many scholars believe that Gypsies derive from people of Indo-European origin who lived in northern India millennia ago and then dispersed. Linguistic evidence supports this view. Other peripatetics are the result of more recent historical processes. In some areas of the world, peripatetics are those people who have abandoned (out of economic necessity or political pressure) their livelihoods as hunter-gatherers, nomadic pastoralists, peasant agriculturalists, or craftspeople and have found new livelihoods at the margins of society. Only one of the volume's authors, Kaminski, deals in depth with such historical processes. The other authors, possibly because of the lack of concrete evidence, have left them aside.

The Other Nomads contains 13 ethnographic case studies of peripatetics in various parts of the world, including Europe, the Middle East, Africa, and Asia. The volume also contains a preface by Fredrik Barth, a useful introduction by the editor, and several general chapters. It draws attention to people who have often been given little coverage elsewhere, and it effectively establishes and explains the features that they hold in common.

A theoretical contribution of the collection relates to the nature of marginalized, small-scale societies and their relationships with complex society. How do such societies create and maintain distinctiveness through time, under often difficult and discriminatory circumstances? The authors discuss, often in detail, various dimensions of the economic, political, social, and ritual lives of their respective groups of peripatetics as these dimensions pertain to both the distinctiveness of the groups themselves and the exclusionary patterns they face from their host societies.

Most of the authors comment on contemporary circumstances and pose questions about the ability of peripatetic groups to maintain themselves in rapidly changing times. Current economic and political pressures restrict the access of these groups to the niches they have exploited in the past. In particular, modern nation-states everywhere attempt to control the inhabitants of their territories. In many areas, peripatetics, who have difficulty escaping state power, hold no formal, legal status. In Europe particularly, but also in such areas as the Middle East, peripatetics move, often clandestinely and without travel documents, across state borders. Also in Europe and other areas, peripatetics are not permitted to maintain their mobility and flexible residential patterns. Government officials, desiring to settle these people, are increasingly unwilling to allow them to set up camps or other temporary residences in their chosen locations. On the economic level, the handmade goods of peripatetics compete with inexpensive industrial counterparts, and their services, too, are often rendered unnecessary. Handmade tools and containers, for example, are replaced by plastic wares. Changes in communications and the mass media threaten the peripatetics' livelihoods. Mechanized transportation, new roads, and the growth of towns lessen the need for the goods and services of peripatetics. Entertainments provided by peripatetics have their modern counterparts in television and movies. Berland notes that the process of Islamization in Pakistan has meant that the entertainments peripatetics offered in the past, such as public singing and dancing, are being restricted (p. 262). Though some of the authors are pessimistic about the ability of peripatetic groups to survive in the future, other authors note the resiliency demonstrated in the past adaptations of these groups and are optimistic that they will discover new niches and strategies in the future.

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Problems of Subsistence

Coping with Uncertainty in Food Supply. I. DE GARINE and G. A. HARRISON, Eds. Clarendon (Oxford University Press), New York, 1988. xiv, 483 pp., illus. $98. From a conference, Bad Homburg, F.R.G., Dec. 1982.

There is no single human way to cope with the production and distribution of food when it is scarce. To approach the point of least variability among humans, to compare human strategies with animal mod-

els, and to make the argument maximally relevant to the evolution of physiology, behavior, and social structure, researchers concerned with how this problem is dealt with focus upon the simplest known human societies. Answers come from anthropologists, geologists, and human biologists, including nutritionists.

Following a conference in 1982, de Garine and Harrison assembled this collection of papers on management of scarcity and uncertainty in the food supply of humans in a range of low-technology societies. The contributors are a cosmopolitan group, distinguished scholars from Europe, North America, and India. It is too bad that publication was delayed so long, as this book had important contributions to make to the field as it was five years ago.

The societies brought into the analysis include some of the standard subjects of case studies—Bushmen, Pygmies, Inuit. Among those who study these well-known hunter-gatherer societies there is increasing awareness that "pure" subsistence is rare and that trade and sale of services to neighboring food producers are the rule rather than the exception. The paper by Wilmsen and Durham is particularly good on this point. Bailey and Peacock outline the reactions to scarcity for the Efe Pygmies, and Bahuchet and Pagezy report on the Aka Pygmies and Zaire's Twa peoples, respectively. Food storage by hunter-gatherers is identified by Testart as a major dimension of variation, and Hladik, Harrison, and Stini each provide an essay on the all-important base-line concept of seasonal variability in food. Huss-Ashmore and Thomas provide a framework for analyzing uncertainty among highland peoples that seems to be generally useful.

The researchers in this volume reject the old functionalist argument from necessity wherein many features of small-scale societies were considered to be explained by the need for an equal food distribution ("otherwise the people would die out"). Empirical studies of ongoing societies, however, have revealed how difficult it is to actually measure food produced or consumed by individuals, even in very small groups. To understand the supply of food, one needs to know the mix of species consumed during the varying seasons of the year and the substitutability of those species. In addition to seasonal variations in food supply, seasons vary from year to year and on longer cycles that may or not be predictable. The sum of species or total biomass of food varies, but also the definition of what is meant by food and the relative inputs of plants and animals and of human energy, in the form of storage, preserving, processing, reconstituting, and so on. The process is enormously complicated in even the simplest societies.

And the distribution of those food resources to individuals and subgroups is also complicated. Since food may be obtained in a wide range of sites and may be consumed in private as well as in public, it requires an army of observers or a very cooperative population to find out what people are eating and where they are getting it. The editors advise researchers that a focus on body fat and other anthropometric measures is more efficient than attempting to measure calories.

The papers in this volume resist easy summary: they reflect the difficulties of fieldwork among populations that are rapidly changing and highly variable in their responses to food shortages (and surpluses) even if and when they are not undergoing rapid "modernization" and incorporation into larger social units.

Some of the other groups reported on in this collection are Hausa (Watts), Turkana pastoralists (Little *et al*), and the "peripatetic" peoples of Afghanistan (Rao and Casimir). The non-producers of food, including the hunter-gatherers, the forest-products traders, peripatetics (such as Gypsies), social bandits, and raider-warriors, are generally characterized by more efficient harvesting strategies, the use of buffers against uncertainty in the form of stored food and "stored" interpersonal obligations, and passing shortages on to other groups by appropriating their food supply. The food producers, herders, horticulturalists, and peasant or tribal-level agriculturalists are generally practicing less efficient means of assuring a steady input of food, as production must exceed consumption not only to provide for seed or stock, but also to offset losses due to insects and rodents in storage, catastrophic floods or droughts, and warfare, which is often another way of describing raids by others attempting to appropriate surplus. Attempts to shift shortages to others more often involve hierarchically arranged groups within food-producing societies than other ethnic groups, as in the case of non–food-producers. But this kind of generalization is premature while researchers are in the midst of documenting the details of how uncertainty in the food supply is coped with through weeks, months, seasons, years, and longer cycles of hardship and plenty. This volume contributes much toward an understanding of the details of some ways in which humans manage uncertainty.

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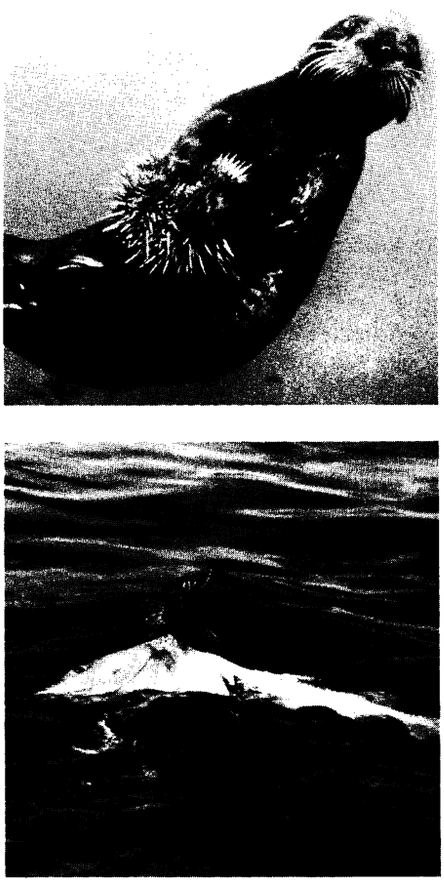
Effects of a Predator

The Community Ecology of Sea Otters. G. R. VANBLARICOM and J. A. ESTES, Eds. Springer-Verlag, New York, 1988. xvi, 247 pp., illus. $89.50. Ecological Studies, vol. 65.

The near extinction and subsequent reexpansion of sea otter (*Enhydra lutris*) populations along the west coast of North America represent one of the true success stories for conservation efforts yet have resulted in a number of controversies for environmental managers and for modern ecological theorists. This volume is an expansion of a 1985 symposium of the Western Society of Naturalists, the intent of which was to review research on the community effects of sea otters, to present the scientific controversies in an open forum for discussion, and to point out where critical information was missing. Field experiments and correlative studies demonstrated that sea otters have large effects on several prey populations, including sea urchins, crabs, clams, and abalone. Otters are thus candidates for "key-



Sea otters with prey. *Top*, carrying a sea urchin to the surface in California; *bottom*, eating a fish in Alaska. [From M. L. Riedman and J. A. Estes's chapter in *The Community Ecology of Sea Otters*; photographs by Richard Mattison and Jane Watson]