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Abstract

As environmental policy matters have gained unprecedented attention, where does environmental anthropology position itself? This chapter argues that a series of ambiguities present in environmental anthropology characterize contemporary forms of dealing with environmental policy and politics. As environmental policy language became omnipresent, while imploding as a self-evident master narrative, policy ambiguity is not only a natural consequence but also an anthropological necessity.

The chapter compares different ways of approaching policy seeking to explore major points of contention. Efforts to explain environmental change and inform policy are analyzed according to their epistemological underpinnings and contrasted with political ecologies grounded in poststructural theory. Subsequently, phenomenological approaches questioning human-nature dichotomies and the modernist assumptions of policy making are debated. The question, I argue, is not whether, but how, to situate and understand the politics and policy aspects of environmental change. Based on a comparison of different tendencies, the chapter argues for a renewed anthropological engagement with environmental policy matters grounded in current methodological multiplicity and intradisciplinary debates. We need to work and address the multiple levels, effects and intersections of policy. This requires both theoretical sophistication and empirical detail. In particular, it entails the consolidation of environment as a relational category. Finally, we need to assert policy and politics as constitutive elements of everyday human environment relationships rather than merely as possible theoretical lenses, super structures or distant ontological constructions. It is only by the exploiting our niche betwixt and between that anthropology maintains a constructive critique of environmental challenges and their solutions.

Anthropology in times of policy implosion

Environmental matters have gained omnipresence in the public sphere unthinkable forty years ago. Environment is a standard element of political campaigns, party programs and national elections. Environmental policy, in turn, has within a few decades emerged as a favored political technology, not only of state structures, but equally private corporations of NGOs. Such proliferation has prompted anthropological attention to move beyond definitions of policy merely as neutral problem-solving devices.

Indeed, environmental policies are now so common that something must be presumed to have gone wrong if a state, corporation or NGO does not yet have one. Municipal by-laws in the most remote corners, national environmental policies, and global agreements (or their absence) testify to its widespread nature. Environmental politics at the heart of contemporary societal debates revealing what might be considered a simultaneous process of environmental policy explosion and implosion. The explosive character of environmental policy making has indeed attained a naturalized place in the institutional landscape.

Yet, simultaneously, it might be argued that environmental policy has imploded. Anthropogenic pressures, the watering out of sustainability language or disarmed state machineries, have led to the inward bursting of environmental self-evidence. In the latest "Global Biodiversity Outlook", UN Secretary General Ban Ki-moon recognized the "collective failure" of halting biodiversity loss, "conflicting policies" and the need for a "new vision" (SCBD, 2010). Despite policy proliferation and some 170 national biodiversity strategies and action plans, species extinction, habitat degradation and human ecological footprints have accelerated. Beyond initial waves of environmentalism, the contradictions and constraints of environmental policy are just as evident as their immediate necessity and functionalities. Take, for instance, the proliferation of policy language on green economies, climate neutrality and biodiversity conservation side-by-side with policies to encourage further consumption, production and global trade to fight economic recession. Whereas Rappaport hypothesized regulation through ritual creating feedback in a context of institutional absence, we are, conversely, now faced with maladaption in a context of ritualized environmental institutionality. This contradiction confronts us as we try to determine how to reconfigure anthropology in a context of ecological constraints (Catton and Dunlap, 1980).

Is there a distinctive anthropological contribution to such policy realities and failures? As elected representatives, social movements, NGOs and the private sector engage in environmental politics and policy-making, where is environmental anthropology positioned? While the simultaneous growth of environmental anthropology as a sub-field could not be more timely, anthropological contributions to policy questions remain ambiguous. As debates for and against anthropological engagement and application continue, questions of how policy and politics are dealt with epistemologically remain a central matter of contention.

"From pigs to policies", the subtitle of Patricia Townsend's introduction to environmental anthropology (2009), eloquently summarizes the growing importance of policy matters as both a societal concern and object of study. Much ethnography today deals as much with state agencies, policy fields and green movements as with kinship, symbols and ritual in the study of human environment relationships. Environmentalisms have penetrated the farthest and most intimate corners and lives of ethnographic interest, often in ways far more dramatic than in the environment discourse producing centers. Take, for example, anthropological encounters with conservation-induced displacement and dispossession (Oliver-Smith, 2009). The human ecologies of hunter-gatherers, pastoralists or farmers are no longer merely portrayed as local adaptation issues, but increasingly contrasted or juxtaposed with national, even global, policy prescriptions and their underlying assumptions.

The shift from the study of localized forms of adaptation and equilibrium towards politically situated situations of change, disequilibrium and context is clear, yet adherence to political context is far from unequivocal (Walters and Vayda, 2009). Whereas ecological adaptation was read into cultural systems and human ecologies (Rappaport, 1984), the growth of environmentalism has since then made (mal)adaptation an explicit, and global, policy concern. Human-environment relationships are no longer (only) debated along terms of questions of culture, adaptation and ecology, but equally bound up in global, national and local green politics.

While politics and the state have thus entered much ethnographic description, their roles and significance remains questioned, at times absent or epistemologically unsettled. This chapter explores the ambiguities of anthropological engagement with environmental policy and politics. Ranging from hands-on involvement, absence to critical distance, environmental anthropology harbors a range of different positions towards engaging

with environmental politics. This, in part, reflects long-standing debates about anthropological engagement, particular epistemological debates and the diversity of objects of study. The article therefore seeks to distinguish the variety of approaches taken to environmental policy matters. The first section portrays anthropology engaged in explaining environmental change and informing policy decisions. The second dwells on political ecology analysis questioning the politics of policy making. The third section explores phenomenological approaches and the uneasiness of approaching policy matters in anthropological representations of ontology and cosmology. The final section discusses and compares their differences. Rather than privileging one form of environmental anthropology over others, the article argues that all three approaches described offer complementary contributions. It is by reasserting the environment as a relational concept that such seemingly divergent anthropologies can and need to be brought into play.

Explaining environmental change, science and policy engagement

There is, arguably, a longstanding inclusion of policy issues and dynamics in ecological anthropology (McCay, 2008). Yet, whereas much environmental anthropology has historically been linked to policy questions, funding and international cooperation, delivery has not been straightforward. Cristina Eghenter, for example, deemed the amount of analysis remaining on shelves as "staggering" calling for a less "assertive" and more methodologically aware anthropology (Eghenter, 2008).

A core policy concern and area of anthropological contention, relates to the analysis and understanding of environmental change. While there is general disciplinary agreement about inserting humans in the ecological equation, as well as thinking in terms of disequilibrium and less bounded social processes, approaches differ considerably.

Informing policy inevitably raises long-debated questions of historical legacies, countered, however, by a vibrant field of engaged theory-cum-problem solving of the discipline (Rylko-Bauer et al., 2008). For many, there is a clear-cut need for contributing to the formulation and improvement of environmental policy. Anthropologists have, as discussed further below, joined policy decision-making tables, as they have engaged in debates on environmental change, resource management and property systems Science, for many, has a natural, perhaps even constitutive, role in relation to environmental policy. Take Harrison and Bryner writing for an environmental policy course noting how: "Science *and* politics define environmental policy making. Environmental problems *invite* scientific research" (Harrison and Bryner, 2004:1, italics added). Their goal is one of synergies allowing scientists to "infuse policy with good science" (ibid:2). Such intimate relations between science and policy are particularly evident in relation to solving environmental problems such as biodiversity loss.

Engaging with policy from this perspective becomes a legitimate form of providing explanation in a contested field, where decisions with socio-environmental outcomes are naturally formed by scientific description and data. Anthropologists have increasingly claimed particular contributions in terms of describing, explaining and resolving environmental problems.

Take, for instance, efforts to "strengthen the links among anthropology, policy, and sustainable environmental management" (Haenn and Casagrande, 2007) and a "persistent desire that anthropology's relevance be translated into governmental action" arguing that "anthropological skills in delineating and negotiating across identity differences would place the discipline at the heart of environmental policymaking" (ibid:9). From this angle, social science contributions form part of the knowledge, competencies and data basis for environmental decision-making considered to have privileged knowledge about social aspects, distant places, "cultural" aspects or social process. Approaches closest to the epistemological foundations of natural science and objective description through problem analysis and documentation of human ecologies have arguably been more readily mobilized. The empiricism of ecological anthropology and the search for causal explanations (Walters and Vayda, 2009, Vayda, 2008) resonates with the internal logic of policies in the emphasis on scientific fact as something independent from theoretical (and political) frameworks. Ethnobotany or indigenous knowledge studies, paralleling scientific classificatory systems, are e.g. used more frequently in site-based planning compared to studies questioning western knowledge categories altogether. It is thus not surprising that a recent article in the American Anthropologists urges to "bring back" quantitative and environmental data into anthropological work in order to effectively contribute to policy (Charnley and Durham, 2010).

Anthropologists have made critical contributions in fields as diverse as site-based planning, environmental change analysis, ethnobotany and impact assessments. Much work in human ecology has exactly sought to translate anthropological insights about socio-ecological realities into new forms of policy action. This has often

involved closer connections between ecological data, energy flows and human ecology questions. Grounded knowledge about communities, foraging, fishing or agricultural practices in particular ecosystems formed natural starting points to inform policy and solve post-Rio policy problems as deforestation and biodiversity loss. Anthropologists have emphasized use rationalities, customary management and local knowledge, where others saw deforestation and ignorance of ecological processes. Cultural ecologies, in places like the Amazon basin, were in the 1970s and 1980s mobilized alongside environmentalisms to counter state incorporation and internal colonization. Anthropology described domestication where others saw diminishing wilderness (Posey, 1985). They depicted community institutions and practices, where decision-makers saw open access. The anthropological rebuttal of the "tragedy of the commons", associated policy solutions and an empirical-cum-policy emphasis on common property rights systems is a good example (McCay and Acheson, 1987). Ethnographic attention to community management practices and systems has often been written in opposition to state policies to privatize, enclose or insert state management. This has involved building alternative models of environmental degradation, reframing questions such as population pressure and poverty. While some "political ecologists perceive policy as a kind of uncouth cousin to be kept at a distance" (Walker, 2006:382), others have researched distribution, access and marginalization issues with fairly explicit policy intentions often couched in environmental justice, rights and equity language (Paulson et al., 2003). Such approaches not only seek to provide useful information for supposedly data-hungry decision-makers, but also attempt to politically contextualize and question the very environmental problem assumptions, categories and constructions employed. What is questioned is not just the accuracy and relevance of policy, but the underlying political ecology. Such analysis has, in part, been viewed as a theory-driven attempt to explain everything through political economy (Vayda and Walters, 1999, Walters, 2008, Vayda, 2008). What they question is the emphasis of politics as explanation and a perceived lack of ecological data in such analysis. Vayda and Walters (1999) question the explanatory value of rendering explicit the political economies of policy, resource access and decision-making. Political ecology, they argue, fails to provide the evidence for the relative importance of political and economic factors. Emphasizing politics can bear the risk of overgeneralization. Take James Scott's recent analysis of cropping patterns in highland Southeast Asia as "escape agriculture" to evade tax collectors and the state (2009:195pp). While the emphasis on politics to explain human environmental relationships, exemplified by crop choice, is thought provoking, the risk is that other key variables, notably, the particular ecology of highland environments are underestimated. The alternative, proposed by Vayda and Walters, involves the empiricist alternative of proposing events, questions and problem-driven research to prime over theoretical propositions. Yet, can we afford to drop theoretical questioning altogether?

While the empirical vigor is laudable, Vayda's rejection of "theory deploying" (Vayda, 2008:n.37) seems overstated. Political ecologists have responded maintaining a focus on "knowledge, power and practice" and "justice, governance and ecological democracy" (Watts and Peet, 2004:20). On another level, it would seem that the insistence on empirical establishment of environment change causalities underestimates the importance of multiple theoretical frameworks to illuminate different aspects of a given environmental change complex. Jonathan Friedman in earlier critique of functionalist underpinnings of ecological anthropology and cultural materialism emphasized the importance of contradictions, autonomy of different subsystems and the interaction of relatively independent structures (Friedman, 1974, Friedman, 1979). If we assume human environment relationships as the confluence of interlinked social and ecological systems with independent, yet mutually impacting, dynamics (Hornborg, 2006), multiple causalities can hardly be apprehended only through theory-free fieldwork. If we acknowledge that human environment dynamics entail constantly changing states of disequilibrium involving a range of co-existing and intersecting processes, rather than a particular logic, theoretical concepts are necessary. Whether speaking of commodity flows, fiscal incentives, carbon credits or power, theoretical insights are fundamental to ask the right questions, work at appropriate scales and consider what is relevant data in the first place. The question is not whether, but how, to situate and understand the politics and policy aspects of environmental change. This is not merely about deconstructing policy logics[1], but recognizing the multiple levels, effects and intersections of policy. While this certainly requires ethnographic openness, it also entails tackling the presence of politics head-on. This is not the same as taking either policy language or theoretical frameworks for granted. As Rappaport noted:

"It may be an epistemological mistake to give our troubles substantive names, for to do so is to reify them and to set them up for the corrective approach dear to American hearts called "problem-solving," which is likely to set more problems than it solves by ripping aspects of complex systems out of their contexts." (Rappaport, 1993:297)

[1] Vayda e.g. questions the utility of forest discourse analysis, seeing evidence limited to "its own domain" (2008:333).

Policy remains external to socio-environmental realities as the empirical starting point, but may 'lose touch' with reality. A frequent argument from the ecological perspective is thus one of political engagement and policy language risking scientific compromise (Harris, 2001:220pp, Vayda, 2008, Rappaport, 1993).

Yet, it is increasingly clear that not just politics of "problem solving," but more widely politico-economic dynamics are inherently part of complex systems constituting environmental change and the way policy is formulated. Take Rappaport's assessment of the fundamental life processes being subordinated by the contingent and instrumental (1993:299). Rappaport e.g. argued how economic instrumentalities primed in policy logics neglecting fundamental biological-ecological systems. For Rappaport this produced social injustices, degradation, as well as reducing the ability of social systems to respond. Approaching such intersections necessarily requires theoretical sensitivity to allow for a comprehensive empirical understanding. Rappaport thus noted how different values were "not free-floating", but "held and promulgated by particular institutions, interest groups, sectors, classes, and individuals, all of which are differentially powerful" (ibid:300). Anthropologists seeking to inform policy have exactly been confronted with such power realities. As Carol Colfer notes, much anthropological engagement has come from inaccurate assumptions about the policy process expecting that more information about localities would improve policy decisions (Colfer, 2008:273-275). Policy makers rarely have the time to read and environmental change often require rapid decisions. Based on her own experience, she notes how "we did not adequately account for the powerful economic and political forces at play keeping policy makers from acting on our findings" (ibid). Her response is one of engaging policy makers more directly in the research process taking into account their institutional, social and time realities. Interestingly, this joins critical studies of the centrality of bureaucracies, policy makers and an understanding of the political economy of environmental decision-making.

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Politics of policy

The emergence of environmentalism and the policies banning DDT following the publication of "Silent Spring" (Carson, 2002 (1962)), marked an often-cited environmental turn, yet without fundamentally putting into question "overproduction" identified by Rachel Carson as "our real problem" (ibid:9). Immediate policy fix was one thing, the wider the political economy of growth another.

Just as Rappaport was criticized for assuming implicit regulatory functions, based on negative feedback, in cultural systems (Friedman, 1979), a critical appraisal of the functionalist assumptions of explicit regulatory policy is today warranted. Whereas managerial approaches to environmental governance, for example, may speak of the necessity of environmental institutions, the role of policy measures as rational problem-solving feedback responses is increasingly questioned. At stake are not merely poorly designed or ineffective policy thermostats, but the conditions and political contexts of regulating environmental affairs. On the one hand, environmentalist policy and agency is no longer the monopoly of governments, but widely distributed among state bureaucracies, business operations and civil society actors. On the other hand, the contradictions of green policy making are increasingly evident. Peter Brosius has, for example, shown the political displacement taking place when Malaysian authorities succeeded in transforming a Northern anti-logging campaign into managerial questions of "sustainable forest management" and certification (Brosius, 1999). Political ecologists have increasingly underscored the political economy underpinnings of policy making. Growing anthropological uneasiness with green truths, environmental narratives and policy action has generated critical literature on environmental discourses.

More recent poststructural or post-Marxist political ecologies (Biersack, 2006) have rejected the presumed innocence, linearity and moral high grounds of environmental managerialism and replaced it with detailed descriptions of discourse, power and politics. What is emerging is, however, not a blind application of political economy, nor the transformation of environmental anthropology into political science. Firstly, anthropologists are less likely to assume the nature of a will to power, *libido dominandi*. Secondly, attention to social categories, discourses and interest groups has generated empirical attention to questions of social movements, ideology and cultural politics as inherent aspects of ecological relations (ibid). Take Escobar's critique of managerial solutions and biodiversity discourse produced by dominant institutions (Escobar, 1998), and his plea for bringing social movements, progressive academics and NGOs into the debate (ibid:76). Resurfacing the politics of environment, often drowned in the technicalities of policy, is a salient aspect of much contemporary ethnography (Zerner, 2000). As Brosius asked "who is listened to, ignored, or regarded as disruptive, and in which contexts? (1999:50)" in what he saw as "institutional envelopment" and "environmental surveillance". What and who is behind technical solutions?

From that perspective, power dimensions are easily masked in the "objective, legal-rational idioms" of policy (Shore and Wright, 1997:8). Shore and Wright have argued for specific attention to policy as a "central concept and instrument in the organization of contemporary society" (1997:4). In a Foucauldian vein, they emphasize policy as language and power, policy as cultural agent and policy as political technology. Confronted with the limitations of managerialism and policy failure, the construction of scientific facts and contributions to policymaking has been rendered problematic. Fairhead and Leach argued how the employment of social science language and analysis is easily complicit in the reproduction environmental narratives. Their point was exactly that policy narratives on deforestation disregarded local social and ecological realities (Fairhead and Leach, 1995). Without questioning environmental problems altogether, they pointed to how social science was instrumentalized for the sake of dominant representations in turn generating particular effects. With the empirical shift from human ecology and the biophysical environment to public policy as an object of analysis (Wedel et al., 2005), the risk is, as others in this volume stress, distance to the effects and actual ramifications of environmental policy "on the ground."

Furthermore, while the uneasiness or upfront critique of environmental policy and bureaucratization (Brosius, 1999) may have dampened interest or ability to directly engage in policy formulation, the focus on policy agency and discourse also offer alternative entry-points. Rather than dooming policy and bureaucratic engagement to failure and surveillance, other anthropologists have engaged in the playing field of the politics of policy. Assessments of agency, interest groups and discourse have e.g. been employed through advocacy or participatory processes to actively promote more just and locally relevant forms of policy (Keeley and Scoones, 1999). Research agendas of political ecologies stressing the agencies, discourses and politics at stake provide complementary knowledge to such policy engagement (Biersack, 2006, Paulson et al., 2003) seeking simultaneously to inform and problematize the ecologies at stake.

Beyond dichotomies and the irrelevance of policy

At first sight, much anthropology seeking to display the variety of ways in which human environment relationships are conceived and lived out seems somewhat distant from the policy debates discussed above. Couched in language of epistemology, ontology and cosmology, anthropologists have argued vehemently against dichotomies such as society/culture and subject-object (Descola and Pálsson, 1996). Stressing the diversity of embedded experiences, policy and politics have remained either in the background or radically questioned. The move beyond the nature-culture dichotomy has maintained much anthropology in epistemological rupture with the underlying separation of humanity from the "global environment" (Ingold, 1993). Philippe Descola thus assumes that if we acknowledge "an unproblematic natural world" then there "can be no escape from the epistemological privilege granted to western culture" (Descola, 1996:85). Policy from this perspective illustrates the radical "other" state, NGO or science projects incommensurable with local realities. The ontological underpinnings of modernist policy action, whether by NGOs or scientists, are contrasted with different ontologies and experiences of the ethnographic interlocutors. Mario Blaser, based on his work among the Yshiro, e.g., speaks of the "inherent coloniality of the modern ontology" and that the modern constitution would collapse "if Indigenous worlds and ontologies were taken seriously" (2009:18). Tim Ingold in seeking to recover "the reality of life process" in ecology notes resistance to "transmission in an authorized textual form" (2000:16). Paige West has questioned the assumptions implicit in political ecology reducing "local socioecological lives" to Western categories of self and agency (West, 2005). Certainly, anthropologists have been at the forefront of contrasting imposed forms of regulations and policy categories with localized forms of environmental relations (Campbell, 2005, Ellen, 1996:28). Gísli Pálsson expresses concerns about the postmodernist emphasis on embeddedness, monism and the absence of certainty hampering "effective politics" (2006:76). Whereas Pálsson's conclusion is the necessity of narratives to maintain earth integrity and avoid ecological bankruptcy, the dilemma encountered is clear. In arguing against society-nature dichotomies, the basis for societal management is considered a modern pretension; both ontologically flawed and averse to other realities. Pálsson suggests a democratic process combining theoretical expertise and practical knowledge (2006:76). Something similar could arguably be considered in the case of the Yshiro, although Blaser sees indigenous knowledge efforts as co-opted under modern ontologies.

Yet, can we assume that policy logics and institutional discursive operations operate at another level ontologically in opposition to and distinct from local ontologies? There continues to be an awkward separation between studies of indigenous perception, bodily experience and cosmology and the day-to-day experience of living in "policyfied" environments. Secondly, the emphasis on ontological difference risks implying radical essentialized alterity rendering the possibility of building new shared understanding of environmental problems almost impossible. Is it ethnographically pertinent to maintain a sharp divide? While constructed as

phenomenological, is there not a risk that the separation of local ontologies from politics and policy realities reflects more of a methodological bias than the social and cultural fabric as lived out? While rejections of modernist dominance and power is warranted, is the insistence of ontological difference not in risk of reproducing the very dichotomy it sought to break away from in the first place? By presenting control and management, and clumsy ways to acknowledge indigenous knowledge, as inherently "modern" is there not a danger of reiterating the existence of non-modern, non-managerial and apolitical ontologies? In prolongation, is it not only politically possible, but necessary, ethnographically speaking, to include interactions with the policy field as part of human environment (ontological) relationships? How do we theoretically come to terms with the people with supposedly radically different ontologies themselves who do policy work, propose management and use science? Is this "buy-in", radical change or do we perhaps need to revisit how politics and policy are conceived in the first place? Can we arguably push for different subjectivities, forms of agency and ways of relating without being caught up in modernist limitations? Additionally, rather than remaining stuck in ontological alterity, need we not move towards a far more fluid notion of human environment relationships, where dialogue and new ways of communicating and understanding environmental problems across ontological boundaries is part of everyday lives of our interlocutors? I believe it is imperative to do so.

As Ingold noted, what for the anthropologist is a cosmology, is a lifeworld for the people themselves (Ingold, 2000:14). Such lifeworlds, the study of them and ethnographic representation, are obviously political, just as concepts of nature are inherently political (Ingold, 2005:503). Rather than situating the political "outside" experience, it is often a part of the environmental relationship. However dramatically politics may seem in opposition to "direct" experience, sharp boundaries positioning the political as external to actual environmental experience cannot be assumed. Ways of walking, experiencing and living environmental relations are often intertwined with resource use restrictions, trade regimes and use policies. Whereas anthropologists have stressed the ontological distance between political constructions and local human environmental relationships, far more needs to be explored regarding their proximity and intersections. To move beyond the dilemmas presumed by ontology studies, Ingold's emphasis on environment as relational, historical and never complete offers a way out (2000:20). It is exactly in the interface through different ways of environing rather than aggregated cultural models or ontologies in opposition, where the real life politics and human environment relationships take place. Thus, for example, while Blaser employs multinaturalism[2] and "many kinds of nature" to question the limitations of modernist multiculturalism, contrasted with indigenous ontologies, the assumption of "different worlds" tends to radicalize difference rather than theorize interaction. Yet, rather than insisting on ontological difference in opposition, the case seems to reveal how different environmental relations intersect, relate and possibly contradict each other. Stating it otherwise, would leave us stuck in an extreme relativism and risks of essentialisms, poorly equipped to explore how the so-called modern forms part of environmental relations as lived out. Secondly, it would withdraw the ability for Yshiro in Paraguay to discuss sustainability with scientists (and vice versa) regardless of ontological models at stake. Consider, for example, indigenous efforts take up "modern ontology" in the Amazon by formulating environmental policy, reworking ways of doing management or collaborating with government agencies. If we were simply to assume that they implied the imposition of modern categories, we would likely not only risk essentialisms, but also rule out indigenous agency, shared ways of formulating environmental problems and appropriations of managerial institutions as inauthentic. More fundamentally, it would reify human environment relationships having separate existences, rather than emphasize their relational characteristic in movement. I therefore find the attempts to speak of multiple worlds problematic[3]. We need to maintain the "environment" as relational category in all its diversity without losing touch with their interconnected nature. I thus prefer the terminology 'plurality of environments' over 'plurality of ontologies.'

If we opt for a relational understanding of environment, it does not exclude *other* politics and policy, nor the possibility of reconfiguring shared understandings of the problems at stake. The answer is not sticking to flawed narratives for the lack of better ones, but working through different narratives and how they currently as well as potentially relate to each other. Human nature dichotomies are not merely to be rejected, but form part of the repertoires employed to communicate environmental change. Anthropology clearly has a role in continuously examining and juxtaposing the categories employed in thinking about human environment relationships. Paige West's call for attention to "the politics of translation and theories of value and spatial production" (West, 2005)

[2] According to Blaser: "a "multinaturalist" approach focuses on what kinds of worlds are there and how they come into being (an ontological concern)." (2009:11).

[3] Take attempts to pluralize ontologies and worlds such as Blaser's emphasis "that there exist multiple ontologies–worlds and the idea that these ontologies– worlds are not pregiven entities but rather the product of historically situated practices, including their mutual interactions" (2009:11). Rather than speaking of them as entities, we need to see them as relational categories, something his inclusion of "mutual interaction" alludes to.

goes in this direction. Translation is feasible, she argues, yet often misses the "fact that human relations with the natural world are aesthetic, poetic, social, and moral." (ibid:633). Ethnographic attention to the diverse environmental relations is fundamental to policy-oriented anthropology. Rather than accepting the premises of sterile state categories and policy rationalities, there is a continued need for ethnography to portray complexity where simplicity prevails, but also to reshuffle the very arenas, language and premises for policy formulation and action. Such work should, however, not fall in the trap of radical ontological difference, but rather nurture culturally grounded, and potentially radically different ways of communicating and crafting policy. Poststructuralist political ecology offers analytical openings to explore such avenues by questioning the how environments are discursively produced in the first place. If we take environing as relational in process, the question of policy and politics does not involve a choice between ontologies, nor necessarily the idea of hybridity[4]. This is not a question of hybridization of natures (Escobar 1998:13), arguably always in working, but of ethnographic attention to the particular articulations of meaning creation, production and forms of interaction. Rather than hybridity, what is at play here is the very relational or contextual nature of environment *per se* being redefined in motion. This entails ethnographic attention to multiple forms of politics inherent in the web of human environment relationships.

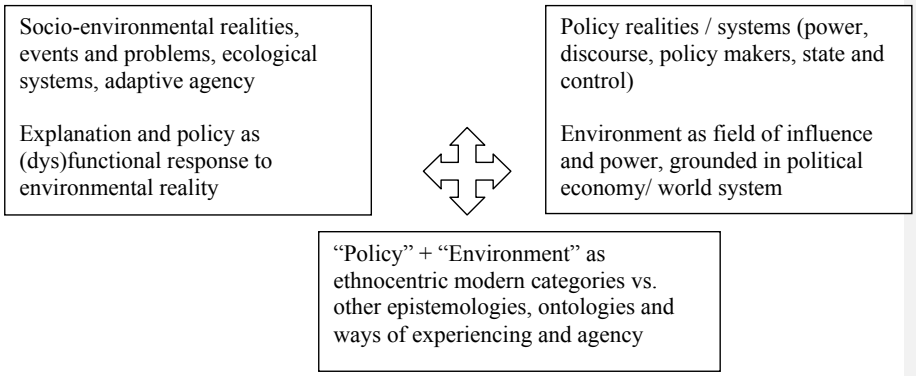
In summary, anthropology has not only put into question human ecologies grounded in equilibrium, but increasingly questioned the very social categories, "interest groups" and ways of environing that constitute a given human-environment relationship. Yet, in insisting on difference, politics have tended to be discarded as outside constructions, rather than firmly part of the environmental relationship. This carries the risk a relativist *impasse* unarmed to address policy implications in ethnographic description of environmental relationships as well as a somewhat unproductive epistemological distance to policy engagement. I here propose recuperating the relational dimension as a necessary way out.

Ambiguities and complementarities

Is seeking to reconsolidate politics in environmental anthropology like opening a Pandora's box of longstanding debates and epistemological differences on determinism, adaptation and symbolism such as those found in Amazonian anthropology (Viveiros de Castro, 1996:184,194)? Is there a need for an integrative approach bridging ecological anthropologies with phenomenological and political ecologies? What is to gain from it? Do differences in terms of epistemology, methodology and objects of study not make the exercise futile in the first place? Put more positively, isn't the variety of approaches exactly valuable due to their separate trajectories?

[4] Arturo Escobar's emphasizes the contemporary rupture of nature ceasing "to be essentially anything for most people" (1998:15). Crisis of nature being a crisis of identity, except as he (foot)notes native peoples explaining essential connections to nature (n.27). Relations previously defined by essence are flowing in change. Could this new situation allow for hybridization, "new ways of living" and "new grounds for existence"?, Escobar asks in a post-modern vein. He e.g. speaks of hybrid natures when "groups attempt to incorporate multiple constructions of nature in order to negotiate with translocal forces" (1999:13), albeit later acknowledges that "all natures are hybrid" (ibid:14).

Environment and Policy or vice-versa



Clearly, the objects of study and their underlying epistemologies are multiple. Yet, in tracing some of the ambiguities present in terms of addressing policy and politics, there are more commonalities than might be apparent at first sight. Where conventional wisdom would situate the environment as the non-human, the biophysical and natural, different strands of environmental anthropology have firmly and repeatedly made the point of its embeddedness in social, cultural and political fields.

Firstly, we are compelled to look beneath policy for different reasons. Whereas ecological anthropologists may interrogate the validity of problem analysis and socio-ecological relevance of policy measures in terms of the extent to which they reflect actual dynamics, the political ecology perspective includes a stronger emphasis on the powers, discourses and political economy behind policy making in the first place. For realist-grounded political ecology, it is a question of political compromise, where policy reflects the given political economy of distributed claims, entitlements and resources. For poststructuralist political ecologies policy as political device and instrument of power is the prime focus; the environment becoming one of several fields of policy making and control. Policy engagement, from this perspective, thus not only risks misrepresentation, but reproducing power imbalances, by aligning anthropological production with the dominant actors, categories and knowledge needs. In prolongation, culturalist strands of environmental anthropology have questioned the very ontological contradictions between policy making and ethnographically described human environmental relationships. As readers, we are compelled to look beyond policy to understand lived out realities. All reveal uneasiness with master narratives and the simplifications of policy prescriptions, albeit for quite different reasons. Joan Vincent speaks of "infrapolitics" as anthropology looks beneath surface realities (2004). Such ethnographic digging may take different trajectories, which are not as mutually incompatible as current practice would indicate.

Secondly, the different lines of questioning retain relevance for a renewed anthropological engagement with the environmental policy field. Grounded data about human environmental relationships remain absolutely essential to counter desk-based policy prescriptions with limited understanding of actual dynamics and social effects. Such "data production" need, however, not be limited to standard socio-environmental data categories. Political ecology has, for example, equipped anthropology with a research agenda and set of tools fine-tuned to both engage with and question political economies of policy-making. Anthropology is today more than ever attentive to the consequences of (un)environmental politics and environmental (in)action whether resulting from trade agreements, consumption patterns or national policymaking. Finally, broader questioning of human-nature dichotomies force us to more profoundly question the categories and representations of environmental matters.

Thirdly, dialogue between different traditions has not only been productive, but remains indispensable. Longstanding debates about function and adaptation, politics or concepts of culture continuously allow for a reframing of human environment relationships. Critique of political ecology at times considered to reduce ecological and cultural complexity has helped sharpen approaches, just as I believe far more needs to be done in terms of bridging political ecologies and more phenomenological approaches. It is the shared interest in the human (ecological) condition, which inevitably requires anthropological debate.

Fourthly, many strands of anthropology share a common perspective on the environment as a fundamentally relational category rather than something "out there". This may be formulated as relations within socio-ecological systems, politically situated relations or ontologically grounded relationships of experience. It may also offer a distinct contribution to broader social science discussions, taken up in this volume, about how humans relate in multiple ways to questions of ecological constraint (Catton and Dunlap, 1980). Debates about the relational nature of the environment is not merely of academic interest, but more fundamentally relevant in rethinking how environmental policy is being reconfigured to address the ecosystem degradation both in terms of its underlying drivers and its socio-environmental effects.

Fifthly, human - environment relationships can no longer be maintained in isolation from wider policy dynamics, nor is politics merely another "factor" in understanding environmental degradation. Politics and policy are, I believe, not merely possible theoretical lenses or particular objects, but constitutive processes of everyday human environmental relationships. Rather than conceiving them as superstructures, distant realms or possible causes of degradation, they are rather constitutive elements of human environment relationships. The importance of the intersection between environmental change and politics is widely acknowledged (Walters and Vayda, 2009:538). The relative importance may be debated, but the question is one of degree. Whether described as outside hegemonic forces, intimate power realities, ontologies, partial explanatory factors or necessary means for environmental change, environmental anthropology offers multiple avenues for empirical investigation and policy engagement of such relations. Michael Herzfeld has argued against "political anthropology" as a separate domain as "all anthropology is fundamentally political" (Herzfeld, 2001:131). We might similarly retain various environmental anthropologies as fundamentally political, albeit in distinct ways and equipped differently to study it.

Between politics and policy: concluding remarks

The discussion of these five features brings me to a last point about policy engagement. Anthropological policy engagement can roughly be divided between efforts that seek to inform policy through data or problem analysis, critical analysis at a distance and more proactive forms advocacy activism, facilitation and brokering. While there is certainly an argument for more timely and rapid research to keep up with the pace of policy makers, organizations and the perceived speed of environmental change, this should not diminish the importance of long haul thinking in catalyzing change. Four decades of intensive environmental policy-making has not delivered magic bullets, but are revealing the complexity of environmental matters at the intersection between social, economic, cultural and biophysical processes. The limitations, ambiguities and politics of environmental discourse and policy decisions are at the heart of the matter. Current climate change canopies or oil spills have, for example, cast shadows over other environmental matters such as biodiversity loss, which despite having 2010 dedicated to its cause, has largely disappeared from the public radar screen. Environmentalist tropes of rapid change and urgency often disguise far more systemic changes and lengthy time frames, which need to be unraveled. There is no escaping from such politics of representation, however apolitical research may define itself. Renegotiating human environmental relationships is at the core of contemporary politics and policy formulation, and multiple anthropologies have much to offer in this respect. We need to get beyond "dichotomizing critiques" of anthropological advocacy (Rylko-Bauer et al., 2008:184), recognizing the shifting terrains of environmental policy and action, in dire need for both theoretical distance, advocacy and practical engagement. This ambiguity in relation to environmental movements, policies and projects may lead to occasional *malaise*, but remains an important feature and source of innovation not just for environmental anthropology itself, but society at large.

Whereas some anthropologists have moved away from politics, environmentalist action and policy engagement, others continue to promote environmental justice, question development agendas and dialogue with policy makers. Differences are not likely to disappear right away, nor should they. As environmental policy language has gained omnipresence, while imploding as a self-evident master narrative, policy ambiguity is not only natural consequence, but also imperative for a critical anthropology. This raises doubts about recent calls for more quantitative approaches to make policy-oriented environmental anthropology effective. Fears that environmental anthropology is "becoming anthropology without environment" (Charnley and Durham, 2010:411) may be exaggerated. While the integration of quantitative and environmental data is certainly important, it should hardly be a prerequisite "whatever its focus" (ibid). Policy relevance is not only about immediate inputs to policy processes and associated data needs, but fundamentally about our disciplinary ability to think through, beneath and beyond existing environmental policy. This may take the form of numbers and hard data, as it may involve softer qualitative approaches. The question is not simply one of making

anthropology more policy compatible, but acknowledging the multiplicity of approaches necessary to illuminate a whole range of policy aspects of human environment relationships. Rather than only privileging data density and problem solving, this chapter equally emphasizes the policy relevance of debates within political ecology and more phenomenological approaches. It is only by exploiting our niche betwixt and between that anthropology maintains a constructive critique of environmental challenges and their solutions. This not only requires reaching out to other disciplines engaging with environmental policy, but equally bringing our own disciplinary diversity into play. It is exactly anthropology's continuous emphasis on the environment as a relational category, which can allow to bridge such approaches and reinvogorate disciplinary contributions to the field of environmental policy.

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Bio

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