

1

Anonymizing Perspectives and Current Understandings of Florida's Late Archaic Past

The notion of “prehistory” is increasingly recognized as a patent misnomer. The term was originally coined in the nineteenth century (Wilson 1851) as a simple temporal marker, intended to distinguish literate societies from those predating the advent of written records. Since that time, however, it has acquired many additional, more value-laden, connotations that have contributed to the caricaturing of countless non-Western peoples and the devaluing of their relationships with their own pasts. Many archaeologists studying so-called prehistoric groups have unwittingly exacerbated this situation by restricting their focus to macroscale evolutionary processes and producing accounts that ascribe little causal power to events and practices commensurate with actual human experience.

In this chapter, I argue that the label *prehistoric* has not only highlighted the difference between literate and nonliterate peoples but has also, in effect, produced a troubling dichotomy between people with history and those supposedly without it (*sensu* Wolf 1982). Of those relegated to the latter group, I suggest that hunter-gatherers have been the most generalized and parodied in anthropological literature, a situation that has repeatedly resulted in overgeneralized, assumption-filled treatments of Archaic societies in the Southeast. I then discuss the current state of knowledge regarding Late Archaic Orange period hunter-gatherers in Florida and examine how dominant, largely ahistorical approaches have impeded archaeological understanding of their lives.

Problems with “Prehistory”

In common usage, the term *history* has two related, yet distinct, meanings. In some instances, it denotes what might be termed “objective history,” the

actual past events and processes associated with a given time period or other phenomenon (social group, place, institution, and so forth). Alternatively, *history* also commonly refers not to the past itself but rather to a representation of some past development, usually in the form of a written text. The term *prehistory* was originally used to mark a deficiency in the represented history of a time period or cultural group due to a lack of written historical records (Wilson 1851). Literate societies have frequently been contrasted with peoples relying primarily on oral accounts or other means of preserving their pasts, which are often seen as less reliable and durable than written descriptions (Henige 1974; Vansina 1985). According to some scholars, accurate history presupposed writing, because it was only through written records that people were able to take events out of their contexts and analyze competing accounts (Cole 2001: 103, citing Goody and Watt 1963; Goody 1977). Anthropologists have long been complicit with such views, as historic and prehistoric archaeologies are widely accepted as being characterized by distinct research questions, methodologies, and narrative scales because of perceived disparities between written sources and other types of archaeological evidence (Trigger 2006: 498). A growing number of researchers, however, now recognize the serious problems associated with maintaining a sharp distinction between historic and prehistoric pasts (e.g., Cobb 2005; Lightfoot 1995; Schmidt and Mrozowski 2013).

Segregating the past in this way ultimately results in the oversimplification and devaluing of non-Western forms of historical practice. It helps perpetuate dichotomies such as “hot” and “cold” (Lévi-Strauss 1966: 233) that uncritically divide the world into people who embrace historical change and people who deny it. In the process, whole societies are branded as “ahistorical” or endlessly “repetitive” (e.g., Fogelson 1989). Emiko Ohnuki-Tierney (1990) suggests that anthropologists’ traditional tendency to ignore non-Western historical traditions stemmed from a subconscious Eurocentric belief that nonliterate peoples did not have their own histories but instead existed in a state of virtual stasis for millennia prior to colonial contact (see also Wylie 1995). Kenneth Sassaman (2010: 1–2) explains that such an image of prehistoric people was necessary to satisfy the modern Western need for a foil, a primitive benchmark against which modern human progress could be measured and its means justified (see also Cobb 2005; Randall 2010: 24). In filling this need, “prehistory” not only came to represent the time period before writing but also became synonymous with simplicity, backwardness, and a lack of cultural development.

The privileging of written accounts over other kinds of history making

has resulted in the production of bland, generalized historical narratives that portray nonliterate and preliterate peoples as culturally conservative and largely unchanging over vast stretches of time. The connotation of “prehistory” has thus been extended from the mere absence of a particular type of represented history to an implied deficiency in the objective histories of many non-Western societies. In other words, what began as an epistemological distinction between written and other forms of historical evidence has since developed into an ontological division between peoples with dynamic, complex pasts and those stuck in never-ending cycles of monotony. For this reason, the notion of “prehistory,” once the stated focus of much of the discipline, is coming under attack by an ever-growing number of archaeologists (e.g., Bradley 2002; Lightfoot 1995; Lucas 2005: chap. 5; Pauketat and Loren 2005; Sassaman 2010; Schmidt and Mrozowski 2013; Schmidt and Patterson 1995).

Hunter-Gatherer Timelessness

The significance of “prehistory”—hereafter referred to as “(pre)history”—beyond its use as a mere temporal marker is clearly demonstrated by popular use of the term in relation to contemporary, living peoples whose pasts have been watered down, ignored, or denied entirely. Scott MacEachern (2013), for example, writes about how, in the absence of written accounts, the histories of people occupying Africa’s Lake Chad basin have been simplistically and invariably linked to the long-term environmental record of the lake rather than the multitude of special and day-to-day practices through which they engage with and represent their pasts. This perspective has led to widespread assumptions regarding the ahistorical character of African societies and a view of their people’s actions as “random, childlike, or meaninglessly repetitive” (MacEachern 2013: 127). In a similar vein, Rena Lederman (1986: 5) laments the treatment of New Guinea Highlanders in both popular and scholarly accounts as “peoples without history,” existing in ecological equilibrium and lacking their own internal dynamism, while Neil Whitehead (2003: viii) argues that indigenous Amazonian histories continue to be widely viewed as either “uninteresting or unknowable.”

No group of people, however, has been more susceptible to such characterizations than those glossed as hunter-gatherers. Since virtually the inception of the discipline, hunter-gatherers have provided anthropologists with the ultimate Other (*sensu* Fabian 1983), a category of people so far

removed from Western ways of living and thinking about the world that they could serve as the necessary baseline for evaluating different levels of cultural development (Barnard 2004; Bettinger 1991: 2). Although the label itself refers only to a particular subsistence strategy, this strategy has been structurally linked to many other sociocultural characteristics to form a generalized model of hunter-gatherers used to differentiate them from supposedly more advanced cultural forms. One of the most persistent and effective ways of distancing hunter-gatherers has been to relegate them, either explicitly or implicitly, to a state of perpetual timelessness, that is, to locate them somewhere outside of history.

In traditional evolutionary and neoevolutionary schemes, hunter-gatherers, in their various semantic iterations (“savages,” “foragers,” “bands,” and so forth), were invariably ensconced on the bottom rung of the ladder of progress, positioned as far as possible from the cultural achievements of Western civilization (e.g., Fried 1967; Morgan 1977 [1877]; Service 1962). Built into these schemes was the notion that hunter-gatherers had somehow escaped the forces of social evolution and remained in something approaching a “pristine” state. As the last vestiges of “natural man,” hunter-gatherers were thus thought to provide anthropologists with their most promising means for reconstructing an “ancient condition of humanity” (Kelly 1995: 1; see also Barnard 2004). In this way, anthropologists relegated not only past groups but also all living hunter-gatherers to a time distinct from, and primitive in relation to, their own (Fabian 1983).

While no contemporary social scientist would argue for the idea of living peoples as evolutionary holdovers, the ahistorical, or at least temporally segregated, character of hunter-gatherer treatments has persisted. For the past several decades, anthropological accounts have tended to privilege broad-scale environmental factors over context-specific historical ones in explanations of hunter-gatherer behavior, reflecting a perspective that harkens back to the ideas of Julian Steward. Steward’s research among Great Basin hunter-gatherers contributed strongly to his influential concept, the “culture core,” defined as those behaviors contributing most directly to the extraction of energy from the environment, namely, “subsistence practices and economic arrangements” (Steward 1955: 37). Other cultural factors such as ritual, ideology, and social organization were considered to be subject to the unpredictable contingencies of history and therefore of secondary importance. While Steward saw the culture core as the foundation of all societies, this was especially true for hunting and gathering peoples, who,

in his view, “evince[d] a less complicated history, whose structure [was] simpler in content and form, and whose institutions were most extensively patterned by subsistence activities” (Steward 1938: 1).

For Steward and many of his contemporaries, the “gastric orientation” of hunter-gatherers and the constraints imposed by their natural environments provided the basis for sweeping cross-cultural generalizations regarding the nature of their societies. These were formalized in *Man the Hunter* into a “generalized forager model” that conceptually linked hunting and gathering with several social and demographic characteristics including egalitarianism, low population density, lack of territoriality, minimal food storage, and band-level organization, all of which were viewed as adaptive necessities for nonagricultural populations (Lee and Devore 1968). The enduring impacts of this formulation were the ecofunctionalist orientation of most hunter-gatherer research and the corresponding homogenization of social and cultural differences regardless of spatiotemporal context (Yengoyan 2004). For the present discussion, the important aspect of both Steward’s culture core and the generalized forager model is that, in the direct linking of hunter-gatherer lifeways with environmental variables, history was removed from the equation and the people in question were rendered timeless.

Perhaps the most glaring evidence of this has been the repeated, often uncritical, attempts by both archaeologists and ethnographers to draw parallels between small-scale “traditional” societies in the present and those in the distant (that is, [pre]historic) past. Common among nineteenth-century cultural evolutionists, this tendency was resurrected in full force during the 1960s and ’70s when data such as those generated by the Kalahari project (Lee 1976, 1979) were helping to paint modern hunter-gatherers as “pristine primitives,” and thus legitimate analogs for understanding virtually any nonagricultural group back to the dawn of humanity. These comparisons relied largely on ecological and technological parallels and necessarily excluded or attempted to filter out historical variables to remain viable. Although the notion of the “pristine primitive” was thoroughly discredited by revisionist scholars who demonstrated long histories of interaction between hunter-gatherers and farming societies (e.g., Headland and Reid 1989; Wilmsen 1983, 1989; Woodburn 1988), modern African (and to a lesser extent, Australian) groups continue to form the basis for many assumptions regarding the social, political, and historical lives of hunter-gatherers in all times and places.

The image of the ahistorical hunter-gatherer has been reproduced more recently by various neo-Darwinian approaches, the most influential of which has been behavioral ecology. With roots in animal behavior studies, behavioral ecology is concerned primarily with human-environment interactions and is focused on the differential persistence of behavioral variations over time. It assumes that humans possess an innate desire to reproduce and therefore relies on the biological concepts of fitness and adaptation in devising models (for example, optimal foraging) against which to compare and predict actual behaviors (Broughton and O'Connell 1999; Kelly 1995, 2000). While not denying the role of extraenvironmental considerations in influencing hunter-gatherer decision making, the behavioral-ecology approach is deliberately reductionist, preferring to focus on specific material elements of hunter-gatherer economies (Winterhalder 2001). In practice, this means that contingent historical and ideological factors are usually downplayed or ignored entirely, resulting in broad generalized explanations of cultural forms. Cultural change is generally dealt with only at the macro scale and is attributed to external adaptive pressures rather than any inherent cultural dynamism. While numerous pointed critiques have been leveled at this perspective (e.g., Bamforth 2002; Ingold 2000: chap. 2; Pauketat 2001; Tëmkin and Eldredge 2007), behavioral ecology continues to exert a substantial level of influence on hunter-gatherer research, especially in archaeological contexts (e.g., Bird and O'Connell 2006; Gremillion et al. 2014; Kelly 2013; Kennett and Winterhalder 2006; Nettle et al. 2013; Thomas 2008; cf. Holly 2013; Moss 2011; Sassaman 2010; Sassaman and Holly 2011).

Hunter-gatherers have also been depicted as timeless because of their perceived lack of historical consciousness and long-term foresight. This line of thinking has been influenced by James Woodburn's (1982, 1988) distinction between immediate-return systems, in which activities are oriented exclusively toward the present and efforts are directed toward obtaining resources to be used almost immediately, and delayed-return systems, in which activities are also oriented toward the past and future and resource investments are made that will not yield a return for some time. This distinction has important ramifications for not only subsistence pursuits but also social organization, as immediate-return systems preclude the existence of formalized rules and institutions that bind people into relationships of long-term dependency. According to Woodburn, hunter-gatherers may have either immediate- or delayed-return systems, while all agricultural