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## Ethnobotany of the Shuar of Eastern Ecuador

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always be possible to *analytically* distinguish cultural meanings from their biophysical repercussions.

The second discussion concerns the political implications of the argument of historical ecology that human activity may very well increase biodiversity, and that there are ancient technologies for sustainably intensifying agricultural production in the Neotropics. While the rejection of notions of adaptation and environmental determinism is thoroughly justified, Erickson's somewhat exaggerated point that indigenous pre-Columbian populations are "responsible for what we now call nature in the Neotropics" (p. 264) ought to be complemented with a critical account of the non-indigenous, capitalist socio-economic forces currently devastating Neotropical biodiversity. Eduardo Brondizio's final chapter on post-Columbian and contemporary land-use and land-cover change in Amazonia, in part approached through remote sensing, does not fully compensate for this omission. Historical ecology can demonstrate the technical feasibility of sustainable resource management in the Neotropics, but it does not provide much hope for transcending the economic system that for centuries has systematically dismantled such practices. Nevertheless, this volume persuasively champions new perspectives on sustainability and challenges its readers to seriously rethink long-term processes of human-environmental interaction.

*Ethnobotany of the Shuar of Eastern Ecuador.* Bradley Bennett, Marc Baker and Patricia Gómez Andrade. Bronx: New York Botanical Garden Press (Advances in Economic Botany, v. 10), 2002. 304 pp. ISBN: 0893274216. [<http://www.econbot.org>]

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This book is a comprehensive list of plant species used and not used by the Shuar from 1985-1990. The botanical basis of the volume cannot be faulted: all the identified species have been vouchered, identified by leading botanists, and cross-checked with floral and climatic data for the region. The method used for collecting ethnobotanical data, such as uses and names, also seems relatively sound: thirteen communities were sampled, Shuar collectors were used, and the Shuar names are accurately transcribed. It catalogues 579 species of plants found by the collectors and lists names and uses of plants where known by the Shuar collaborators. As such, this volume will be useful for researchers such as myself who can use it to support further research into Shuar natural resource use.

The book does suffer, however, from a narrow understanding of anthropological methods and approaches. Although it offers a brief ethnological

section in the introduction, it is apparent that the researchers did little, if any, ethnographic research. On p. 15, a short table listing basic demographic data for the principal informants is touted as a full listing of “ethnographic data.” This rudimentary treatment of ethnography leads to small errors. For example, the listing for *Nicotiana tabacum* (tsank, tabaco, tobacco) claims that tobacco juice is drunk (pp. 263–264), when in fact it is often snorted. Water fused with tobacco is cupped in the hand and held under the nose, effectively obscuring both the nose and mouth from sight. It is easy to see how such a mistake could be made by someone who has not carefully observed and/or participated in the activity.

Minor errors such as this one are less significant than the absence of all but the most obvious symbolic, religious and social significances. For instance, although the ritual uses of the important hallucinogens *Banisteriopsis caapi* (natem, ayahuasca) (p. 197) and *Brugmansia* spp. (maikuwa, floripondio, english trumpet) are listed (pp. 258–259), the listing for *Arachis hypogaea* (nuse, peanut, mani) does not include its importance for Shuar women (p. 170), who often bathe in peanut water to cleanse themselves for rituals. Peanut has mythological significance related to a woman’s ability to give birth (Carvajal and Shacay 2003:25–26), and in my interviews with women, it was clearly one of the most important species in determining the moral and affective worth of women—to live well, Shuar women must successfully grow peanuts. Another example is *Musa x paradisiaca* (champiar, plantain, plátano), which is listed as food and medicine (p. 217), but which also has an important symbolic value for Shuar gardens. As it is the responsibility of men to plant plantains around the perimeter of a garden, a garden without plantains is considered to be the garden of a widow, with all the difficulties and privation that that implies. The fact that many Shuar women no longer cultivate peanut and that the symbolic import of the plantain is not always known makes it that much more important that such information be included in this book. I have found with both the Shuar and the Wõt<sup>h</sup>hĩhã that symbolic, religious and social knowledge about plants is often the most vulnerable (Heckler 2007), suggesting that the book’s aim of counteracting ethnobotanical knowledge loss would be better met by closer attention to this type of data.

Given that it would be impossible for one book to describe everything that the Shuar know and feel about the plants they interact with, such oversights are arguably not a major basis for criticism. However, there is a much more serious issue that this book has not addressed. On page 1, the authors state the rationale for their book: “As forests disappear and traditional lifestyles change, the probability of preserving botanical knowledge diminishes. In this volume, we aim to help to counteract this trend by examining plant use by these Amazonian people.” What they do not make clear is for whom they wish to preserve such knowledge. Aside from researchers such as myself, this volume would be useful to two groups of people: bioprospectors wishing to use

indigenous knowledge as a tool to guide their sampling; the Shuar themselves, who are currently searching for ways to document and teach their traditional knowledge. In the 1980s and 1990s, many ethnobotanists believed that bioprospecting could further the development goals of indigenous people (King and Carlson 1995, Berlin et al. 1999). Subsequent failures of bioprospecting projects soon showed that this was an overly simplistic view of the problems facing indigenous societies (Moran et al. 2001; Castree 2003; Greene 2004). This book was published shortly after the high profile controversy that ended the Berlins' ICBG-Maya project in 2001 (Berlin and Berlin 2004), so I had hoped to see some discussion of the difficult ethical issues that arise as a result of its release into the public domain, but there is none.

Several of my Shuar acquaintances have asked me about and expressed dissatisfaction with the outcome of this study. They have voiced concerns that the information may have been made available to bioprospectors without including Shuar representatives in any of the negotiations or material benefits. These are complex issues and I have no proof of their suggestions, but such claims, combined with a lack of any meaningful consideration of them in the book, leave me uneasy. One participant of the study, to whom I spoke in 2007, told me that he participated because he wished the information to be documented and preserved for his people. He told me that a copy of the book had been given to him, but it was in English, therefore virtually useless to his community. This seems a pity to me, as this book would be most valuable as a resource for the Shuar authorities and educators who could use it as a basis for their own development and research projects. As it is, the book is more accessible to the bioprospectors than to the Shuar. Let us hope that at the very least a Spanish version is forthcoming.

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The appearance of Chacon and Mendoza's twin edited volumes *Latin American Indigenous Warfare and Ritual Violence* and *North American Indigenous Warfare and Ritual Violence*—the result of a 2003 AAA symposium titled "Problems in Paradise"—marks the latest expression among Americanists of a renewed interest in recent times on the subject of Amerindian warfare (see Goodrich 2002; Brown and Stanton 2003; Valentine and Julien 2003; Jones 2007; Chacon and Dye 2007). These two volumes differ from previous ones in not being concerned with determining the causes of Amerindian warfare, or establishing a taxonomy of war patterns, or analyzing its material aspects. Rather, they seek to counter the increasing influence of "revisionist" groups who contend that references to Amerindian warfare and ritual violence in early colonial sources are a European fabrication intended to discredit indigenous peoples and justify their conquest.

As the editors assert, scholars have tended to ignore revisionist "denial