

The Evolution, Cognition, and Culture

Bagel Hour

Presents

Bram Tucker

University of Georgia

February 26, 2015

3:30-4:45 pm

Beach Hall, Rm 404



**Coming home empty-handed:
Cultural, behavioral, and cognitive approaches
to subsistence risk among foragers, farmers, and
fishermen of southwestern Madagascar**

The subsistence farmer, forager, and fisherman faces the daily reality that crops fail, hunters come home empty handed, bad weather prevents fishing, livestock die, and selling prices in the marketplace drop. This research examines choice under risk, specifically choice of crops, prey, and market strategies, in the context of southwestern Madagascar's highly unpredictable climate, multiple subsistence modes, and recent social changes. First I will briefly summarize the results of fieldwork conducted over the past 20 years by myself and colleagues from the Université de Toliara, Madagascar, examining choice under risk among Masikoro farmers, Mikea foragers, and Vezo fishermen from the perspective of oral history, neoclassical economic theory, the livelihoods framework, and experimental economics. Then I focus on recent research examining southwestern Malagasy's shared understanding of cause-and-effect relationships linking both ecological and supernatural forces to expected harvests, and the possible influence of culture (as causal models) on choice. I will conclude with some thoughts about what "choice" means and the limits of what we can expect to know about other peoples' decisions. This research is significant for scholars interested in prehistoric subsistence transitions, for foragers became farmers through a series of choices to emphasize crops over prey. It is also significant for those interested in current subsistence transitions that occur as conservation and development practitioners to encourage rural peoples practice more profitable or sustainable activities.

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