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The Fire and the Fauna

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## BRIEF COMMUNICATIONS

### VIRILOCAL AND UXORILCAL

There is a tendency in Social Anthropology at present to make this subject "more scientific." One of the first requirements is a clear terminology, which ought to be accurate etymologically as well as logically. The adjectives "patrilocal" and "matrilocal" do not fulfil these requirements.

In contrast to other terms derived from Latin or Greek, these terms are not intelligible to the beginner without explanation. It goes without saying that, logically, "patrilocal" and "matrilocal" make sense only when there is at least one child. Moreover, it stands to reason that the antithesis "patrilocal" or "matrilocal" is justified only where the parents of the child live at different places of permanent residence and the child is staying with either the father or the mother. This may be the case after a divorce, or separation, of the parents; it also occurs in certain cases of polygyny where each of the wives has her separate domicile. In the majority of cases, however, parents will live together, having their children with them, and in all these cases the terms "patrilocal" and "matrilocal" are out of place. If, however, these terms are meant to indicate whether the parental couple shares the residence of the father's or the mother's kin, they are incorrect etymologically and misleading.

Actually, of course, in using the terms "patrilocal" and "matrilocal" we are not, or at least not in the first line, thinking of the children. These terms are supposed to indicate that a married couple lives at the locality of either the husband's or the wife's family, the third possibility being, in Vinogradoff's terminology, "isolated settlement." In particular, if we want to coin a term to denote where a married couple settles down after the marriage ceremony there is no sense in deriving such term from *pater* and *mater*, seeing that there is no fatherhood or motherhood yet. At this stage we are not dealing with parents but only with husband and wife. It is, therefore, obvious that, if we want special terms at all, we have to derive them from "husband" and "wife," and the Latin equivalents, *vir* and *uxor*, recommend themselves. It is of no importance here that there are not two legal systems, highly developed or primitive, where the social and legal position of a husband or a wife is entirely the same. Notwithstanding the great variety of forms, it is legitimate to retain the general concept of *marriage* and, implicitly, the terms for its partners.

I propose, therefore, to adopt the adjectives *virilocal* and *uxorilocal* to indicate whether a married couple shares the domicile with the family of the husband or with the kin of the wife. I believe that these terms are unobjectionable from both the etymological and logical points of view. In addition, to the student they offer the advantage that a confusion with the classical terms *patrilineal* and *matrilineal* is excluded. It will still be advisable, however, to indicate in each case what the specific meaning of the term is, i.e., whether "locality" means the dwelling or the village, etc., also whether the arrangement is permanent or temporary.

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### THE FIRE AND THE FAUNA

In a recent number of the *Anthropologist* I ventured some comment upon Dr. Carl Sauer's theory of the possible extinction of the terminal Pleistocene fauna through the

use of fire drives by the paleolithic forerunners of our American Indians.<sup>1</sup> I indicated what seemed to me the major objections to this admittedly interesting hypothesis, and among these I said: "Why, if this method was so deadly, did the living bison and the living antelope roam the plains in countless numbers?" I then dwelt on the fact that it is "difficult to accept the destruction postulated for a scant number of early hunters and then to find that the same methods were having no observable effect on bison or antelope numbers within historic time."

This objection to Dr. Sauer's hypothesis seemed, and still seems to me almost insurmountable. Nevertheless in the year or so which has elapsed since the publication of my paper a suggestion has been voiced which, so far as I know, has never actually found its way into print though it has been mentioned once or twice in informal discussions by scientists of repute. The contention runs somewhat as follows: *Bison taylori* was an animal which, because of some genetic peculiarity, showed inadequate fear responses to fire. It failed to run from the grass fires generated by hunting man. Therefore it perished while *Bison bison*, the existing form, survived because it had the appropriate fear response and ran away.

Now scientifically I object to theories which by their very nature involve unprovable hypotheses. *Bison taylori* is gone and his psychological quirks, if he had any, have departed with him. I entertain doubts if his mental makeup varied greatly from that of the other bisons, but there is nothing here to get one's teeth into. The researcher who uses facts is helpless before the individual who conveniently explains every case of extinction as the result of the mysterious failure of some life instinct in that particular form. The instincts and, I might particularly add, the *lack of an instinct* does not survive for paleontological investigation! If we are to explain extinction in this manner we might just as well retire to the armchair and the study and emerge for field work no more.

Nevertheless, in the mind of anyone who has read this far a doubt will have been generated. It is the sort of nebulous doubt always left by hypotheses of this sort. Nothing has been proved but still it offers a way out of a difficult impasse. Animals *do* vary. Perhaps the suggestion has merit . . . At this point we are lost. We are lost, that is, unless we find it possible to demonstrate that, *accepting this interpretation of the psychology of Bison taylori at its face value, we can show similar reactions in Bison bison*. If we can do this and nevertheless recognize that the latter form survived in comfortable millions down into modern times the force of this argument will have spent itself. I quote, therefore, from an early American source:

The surrounding country is all on fire; but happily for us we are encamped in a swampy place. When the fire passes over the plains, which circumstance happens almost yearly . . . great numbers of horses and buffaloes are destroyed; for those animals when surrounded by fire, will stand perfectly still, until they are burned to death.<sup>2</sup>

This is not the terminal Pleistocene of moisture and pluvial damp which is being

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<sup>1</sup> "The Fire-Drive and the Extinction of the Terminal Pleistocene Fauna," *American Anthropologist*, 1946, Vol. 48, No. 1, pp. 54-59.

<sup>2</sup> Harmon, Daniel W., *A Journal of Voyages and Travels*, p. 90. Allerton Book Co., N. Y., 1922.

described. This is not stupid *Bison taylori* being hunted into oblivion by the Folsom wanderers. This, instead, is the second decade of the 19th century and the bison dying in these occasional grass fires are part of those enormous million-hooved brown herds about which Harmon writes, a page farther on:

Indeed, in these plains where buffaloes are numerous, it is not customary nor is it needful for people who are travelling, to burden themselves with provisions; for if they have fire arms, they can always kill a sufficiency for the day.<sup>3</sup>

Whatever the fate which befell the long-horned bisons, this comment from old Daniel Harmon's *Journal* hardly encourages the idea that *Bison taylori* perished because he gazed too long and stupidly at man-made fires. His stupid modern brother survived the attentions of a much more numerous horde of aborigines and hunting whites—survived in millions until the railroad killers came and the free range passed away. It would seem that we must look elsewhere for the explanation of the disappearance of *Bison taylori* than to the failure of his fire reactions. Bad though they may have been there is no suggestion that similar stupid behavior injured the survival of his modern descendant.

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#### LAND TENURE IN THE NORTHEAST: A NOTE ON THE HISTORY OF A CONCEPT

Recently, in an excellent paper on the culture of the northeastern hunters, Dr. John M. Cooper has discussed the family hunting-ground system in relation to its ecological background.<sup>1</sup> He is at pains to determine the first writer who discussed the family hunting territory in relation to the type of game exploited in the eastern woodlands. Dr. Cooper indicates that the first such student, according to his knowledge, was a Dr. Rae who wrote in 1882.<sup>2</sup> Most certainly Rae has been neglected, but from the standpoint of anthropological history the idea in question can be shown to have been entertained much earlier.

It is largely a matter of chance whether such records are rescued from the oblivion of early documents. All we can do for the sake of the history of our science in later centuries is to place such items in journals where the historian of science may have ready access to them. Dr. Cooper has done us one such service in his tribute to Rae. I, in my turn, should like to quote from Daniel Harmon's journal of 1820, written over half a century before Rae:

Every tribe has its particular tract of country; and this is divided again, among the several families, which compose the tribe. Rivers, lakes and mountains serve them as boundaries; and the limits of the territory which belongs to each family are as well known to the tribe as the lines which separate farms are, by the farmers, in the civilized world. The Indians who reside in the large plains, make no subdivisions of their territory; for the wealth of their country consists of buffaloes and wolves, which exist in plenty, everywhere among them. But the case is otherwise

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 91.

<sup>1</sup> Cooper, John M., "The Culture of the Northeastern Indian Hunters: A Reconstructive Interpretation," *Papers of the Robert S. Peabody Foundation for Archaeology*, Vol. 3, p. 291. Andover, Mass., 1946.

<sup>2</sup> Rae, J., *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute*, 1882, Vol. 12, pp. 274-275.