



# The process of human colonization of Southern South America: Migration, peopling and “The Archaeology of Place”



Luis Alberto Borrero

CONICET-IMHICIHU, Buenos Aires, Argentina

## ARTICLE INFO

*Article history:*  
Available online 3 January 2015

*Keywords:*  
Colonization  
Ethnoarchaeology  
Landscape knowledge  
Late Pleistocene  
Patagonia

## ABSTRACT

This paper describes the significance and relevance of concepts presented by Lewis Binford in “The Archaeology of Place” (1982) in studying the process of human colonization in Patagonia. Models and observational techniques inspired by and presented in that seminal paper have been instrumental in the discussion of the mobility of the first inhabitants of southern Patagonia. The result is a flexible ecological model of a slow process of human expansion into the southern end of the continent, and the recognition of at least three early occupational nodes.

© 2015 Published by Elsevier Inc.

## 1. Introduction

The study of the process of human colonization of new lands is as long as the history of archaeology. Effectively, the process of peopling of continents like America was among the first subjects to attract the attention of archaeologists and ethnographers (e.g. Holmes, 1918). In spite of this very long commitment and the tremendous amount and quantity of the accumulated data, the issues are still far from clear. One reason for this is that data without adequate frames of reference are next to useless, and the discussion of the peopling of America proves this. Dominant positions like “Clovis-first” or “Pre-Clovis” were discussed for years i.e. Fiedel, 2000), and it was observed that it was not sufficient to find a site older than 11,200 BP south of North America to settle the issue (Goebel, 1999). This information may solve the chronological side of the question, but it will be hardly relevant to understand the ways in which the peopling process operated.

The process of peopling is longer than previously speculated as indicated by strong information recently published for the period immediately after the Last Glacial Maximum in North America (i.e. Waters and Stafford, 2013). There are even older claims, most of which still require better formational and taphonomic support (i.e., Boëda et al., 2013). In any case, what we still need is a better understanding of the process of human colonization. Minimally, a discussion concerning its broader significance is required. In a sense this depends on what Binford calls the prior knowledge that the investigator brings to the discussion, since “observations are one thing, and what constitutes evidence for a given interpretation is quite another” (Binford, 1991a:275).

E-mail address: [laborrero2003@yahoo.com](mailto:laborrero2003@yahoo.com)

## 2. Ethnography and human mobility

The mechanisms of colonization were usually discussed by appealing to the concept of migration (Martin, 1973; Greenberg et al., 1986; Mulligan and Kitchen, 2013). Migration alludes to permanent intentional or unintentional abandonment of a former territory (Kelly, 1992:45; Gamble, 1994:7). The discussion of these concepts was not central to most processual archaeologies, but some of the recent advances in the study of peopling processes can be traced to classic processual studies (i.e. Binford, 1982). Anthony mentions that “Migrants are not likely to move to areas about which they have no information” (Anthony, 1990:901), but clearly many times this was exactly the case. Indeed, migration or some sort of movement of people is required to explain the filling of previously unoccupied lands. Scouts probably were basic components of the process of human expansion, and their function was to acquire geographic and subsistence information.

Migration processes were mostly conceived at grand scales and were measured in hundreds or thousands of years (Anderson and Gillam, 2000; Surovell, 2000). These are the appropriate scales to discuss continental colonization, and they are useful to clarify some of the properties implicated by the peopling process, such as the need to adapt to a variety of contrasting habitats, or the conditions under which the movement would have been fast or slow (Gamble, 1994). On the other hand, the limitations posed by lack of knowledge about new resources or the need for social networks behind the success of colonization are subjects that need to be discussed at other scales. This is the point at which ethnographic information is extremely useful.

For example, ethnography has been especially informative for the understanding of the adaptations to cold required to colonize

Beringia (Nelson, 1969) as well as for the process of acquiring knowledge about new resources (Kelly, 2003; Meltzer, 2009). But rarely has ethnographic information about the ways in which humans expand into new lands been intensively used. Kelly notes the scarcity of information about “ethnographically known hunter-gatherers moving into terra incognita” (Kelly, 2003: 44). Most of the available information concerns movements into areas which were already occupied by other people, like the case of the Kutchin that “might decide to spend a season, a year, or more in the area of another tribe” (Nelson, 1973: 274). For that reason, it is very important to use whatever information is available.

The ethnographically and ethnohistorically well researched information provided by the 19th century Inuit displacement from Baffin Land to N.W. Greenland, (Freuchen, 1961; Mary-Rousselière, 2008 [1980]) is relevant here. This displacement indicates the importance of social causes for movement, since the reason behind the abandonment of Baffin Land appears to be “une histoire de meurtres et de vengeance” [a story of murder and revenge] (Mary-Rousselière, 2008 [1980]:30). This movement involved some 40–50 people and took years to complete, a period during which the Inuit had to deal with unknown territories and resources. They were even forced to scavenge “restes de phoques abandonnés sur la glace par les ours” [seal remains abandoned by bears on the ice] (Mary-Rousselière, 2008 [1980]:44).

The adventures of this group of Inuit constitute a “living” example of a situation in which “The facts of interest are the ways in which places are differentiated one from another, and how this differentiation is related to patterns of seasonal environmental dynamics” (Binford, 1982:28). Effectively, Baffin Land and N.W. Greenland differ in many important ways from each other, and all these differences required special attention on the part of the migrants. They moved during summer, they had to settle during winter, and they had to select resources according to this seasonal rhythm in accordance with the requirement of good information for “the most limiting time of the year” (Gamble, 1994:111). At the end of their journey, they made contact with the “Polar Eskimo” with whom they have communication problems. In the end, the migrants found that they did not fit in easily, reaching a point at which some of them decided to return to the homeland.

McGhee thought that this information could be useful to estimate hunter-gatherers’ migration rates, and calculated that a distance of some 1000 kms traveled in just three years was proof of fast movement (McGhee, 1997: 103). However, I do not think that his calculations took all relevant facts into account. It may have taken about three years to reach N.W. Greenland, but on their way they spent near five years at Devon island (McGhee, 2004: 234), and the distance that they had traveled up to that point was only about 150 kms (Mary-Rousselière, 2008 [1980]). After their arrival at Greenland, they settled for several years and, at some point, the group split up, with some people moving back. In sum, it took them about 10–12 years to move multi-directionally within a radius of some 700–1000 km.

Mobility is one concept that archaeologists often use, whose main properties are derived from ethnoarchaeological work. It concerns movements basically related with subsistence, but also with other human interests (Sellet, 2006; Politis, 2006; Whallon, 2006), including escaping from starvation (McGhee, 1997). Moreover, there is an organizational framework within which all these goals are interconnected. As Kelly says, “the ways people move exert strong influences on their culture and societies” (1992: 43).

Binford’s work among the Nunamiut developed useful information on mobility, economic zonation and annual ranges (1982–1983). The concept of territorial or long-term mobility, which refers to cyclical movements over a long period, perhaps a decade, is an important one (Binford, 1982; Kelly, 1992). The economic zonation offered by Binford is in part a development of concepts from the

Cambridge School of Paleoeconomy (Higgs and Vita-Finzi, 1972). Its main contribution to the discussion of places was in distinguishing the importance of foraging and logistical radii from a central hub, and archaeological implications at larger scales. Binford defined different modes of movement which he called, “half-radius continuous”, “complete-radius leapfrog” and “point-to-point” patterns. A description of the subsistence of people on the move, how they move, and the conditions under which they selected different modes of movement was a welcome addition to discussions at a microregional or location-specific scales. These discussions impacted the ways in which we currently discuss the past use of the landscape (Kelly, 1992), to the point that there are claims for example, that the archaeology of Australia is “basically an ‘archaeology of place’ in the sense Binford (1982) describes” (Smith, 2013: 13). Settlement began to be seen in terms of possible number of “moves per year”, and duration of use of places began to be measured in terms of the availability of fuel and food. Among other things, these concepts helped to further thinking about tactics that people use to explore and appropriate space (Surovell, 2000). The combination of the results of ethnoarchaeological research with the issue of acquisition of knowledge (see below) was adequate to produce fresh views on peopling processes.

### 3. The Archaeology of Place and colonization

Clearly, Binford did not write “The Archaeology of Place” as a study on colonization. Indeed, most of its utility is not related to that subject or even to his often-quoted concepts of economic zonation. Assemblage variability within and among places is the focus of the paper. However, some of the central concepts presented in that paper are important in clarifying colonization issues. For example, a variant of his “half-radius continuous pattern” appears to describe the kind of wave advance that people like Martin (1973) and others have in mind when proposing that America was populated by people advancing swiftly and extinguishing the megamammals at the same time.

Anyway, the concept of leapfrogging means different things to different authors. Anthony mentions that “great distances may be jumped and large areas bypassed through the agency of advance ‘scouts’ who collect information on social conditions” (Anthony, 1990:902). Then there is discontinuity in the use of space in Anthony’s leapfrogging, which is similar to what Binford calls the “Point-to Point” pattern. Both patterns should be archaeologically characterized by multimodal distributions of sites. The global record shows that there are places that were never colonized by hunter-gatherers, such as remote islands, or plateaus and other highlands that were ignored or just traversed (Charlin et al., 2011; Méndez et al., 2013). In other words, humans select where to go and where to stay. In the long-run, demographic, environmental and social reasons may accelerate or retard the process for decades or even centuries. Most certainly this is the reason why – together with taphonomic bias – so many spatial and temporal discontinuities are observed in the archaeological record.

Thus, evidence for spatial discontinuity is not necessarily related to difficulty of human colonization. We can safely assume that most of the required survival strategies and tactics were available for the first *Homo sapiens* exploring the Americas (Borrero, 2011). What ethnography teaches us is that organizational issues are always involved in the explanation of these spatial gaps. They have more to do with demography and human selection of attractive places for initial settlement than anything else. In sum, it can be asserted that there was a ranking of environmental patches or habitats (Borrero, 1989; Beaton, 1991; Politis, 2006), and that people made decisions about where and how to move based on a number of criteria. In a world without neighbors it is possible that productivity is the main reason to select places to stay (Anderson

Download English Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/en/article/1034909>

Download Persian Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/article/1034909>

[Daneshyari.com](https://daneshyari.com)