

DEPARTMENT OF ANTHROPOLOGY

COLLOQUIA

Linking Language, Culture, and the Environment: Twenty years of Biocultural Diversity Research and Action

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Indigenous societies tend to make no distinction between “nature” and “culture”, seeing people as an intrinsic part of a greater whole that is the natural world. In Western ways of thinking, instead, “nature” and “culture” have often been conceptualized as distinct realms, and people have been seen as separate from (and even dominant over) nature. So pervasive has this dichotomy been, that our vocabularies contain no words to refer to “nature *and* culture” together.

The concept of biocultural diversity emerged two decades ago as a way of bridging this gap. A new word had to be coined to encapsulate the idea that diversity in nature (biodiversity) and diversity in culture (cultural and linguistic diversity) are all manifestations of the diversity of life, and that they are interconnected and interdependent. Over the past twenty years, biocultural diversity has increasingly taken hold both as a holistic way of viewing our place in the world, and as an integrative field of research and action. This lecture reviews the history and conceptual foundations of biocultural diversity and its applications in a variety of “real-world” situations.

Luisa Maffi (Ph.D., Anthropology, University of California at Berkeley, 1994) has spearheaded the development of the concept and field of biocultural diversity since co-founding the international NGO Terralingua <www.terralingua.org> in 1996. Her edited book *On Biocultural Diversity: Linking Language, Knowledge, and the Environment* and the co-authored *Biocultural Diversity Conservation: A Global Sourcebook* have helped establish the field’s theoretical and practical foundations. Together with her economist and ecologist partner David Rapport, she is working on a book that takes a global look at nature and culture and assesses our prospects for a more sustainable future.