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# Models of plant-human interaction and the characterization of the indigenous knower in ethnobiology.

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## Abstract

Thirty years ago, Janis Alcorn's bench mark work, *Huastec Mayan Ethno-botany*, provided a model of plant-human interaction that profoundly influenced the field of ethnobotany; such a framework is still relevant today. Alcorn's proposal situates the indigenous ecological knower in a physical environment, a cognized environment, a variegated agricultural and plant-exploitation practice, and a social niche within a national (Mexican) class society. It truly is of an interdisciplinary nature, since it integrates agronomical, anthropological, botanical, ecological, and historical perspectives. My presentation explores, from a dialectical standpoint, the conceptual mappings and reconfigurations that such a model entails. The social characterization of the indigenous ecological knower in other ethno-biological literature is also discussed. Focus is mainly on reports dealing with traditional farmers and agro-ecosystems in Latin America. An argument is made that, beyond the fact of being indigenous, the social identity of the agriculturalist has been either circumvented or described under such general and timeless headings as "subsistence farmer" or "peasant". Few papers, like Alcorn's, have sought a more thorough treatment, which is unfortunate since the social placement of the farmer may influence selection pressures affecting cultivars and associated flora in the anthropogenic environment.

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