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**Interviewer /Depositor:** Adam Lee Cilli

**Narrator:** Paul "Jim" Roscoe

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**Description:** **4006 Paul "Jim" Roscoe,** interviewed by Adam Lee Cilli, January 22, 2014, in his his office in South Stevens Hall at the University of Maine, Orono. Roscoe talks about the beginnings of his career in anthropology; how he gradually came to apply his training to explore the human dimensions of climate change; his involvement with the Climate Change Institute; his role in developing the CCI's Integrative Graduate Education and Research Traineeship program; and the reality of anthropogenic climate change.

Text: 7 pp. transcript
Recording: **mfc_na4006_audio001** 43 minutes

**Related Collections & Accessions**

**Restrictions**

**Formats Included** Document: Original= .docx, Master= .odt, Access= .pdf; Sound: Original= .mp3, Master= .wav, Access= .mp3

**Notes**

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**Narrator:** Paul "Jim" Roscoe

**Interviewer:** Adam Lee Cilli

**Transcriber:** Adam Lee Cilli

**Date of interview:** January 22, 2014

ABSTRACT: This interview took place in Paul Roscoe's office in South Stevens Hall at the University of Maine in Orono. In the first half of the interview, Roscoe discussed his attraction to anthropology and how gradually he came to apply his training to explore the human dimensions of climate change. Later, he reflected on his involvement with the Climate Change Institute, and his role in helping to develop the Institute's IGERT program. Towards the end of the interview, he shared his views on the so-called climate change debate.

Note: This is the transcriber's best effort to convert audio to text, the audio is the primary material.

Cilli: This is an interview with Paul Roscoe. Today is January 22, 2014, and this is Adam Cilli conducting the interview. So, I'd like to ask you how you got interested in anthropology.

Roscoe: Yeah, long story. My undergraduate degree was in physics. I came out with my degree in physics, and one thing I really figured was that I didn't want to do physics for the rest of my life. Ironically, I didn't feel it was intellectually challenging enough. It was primary because when you're doing it at the undergraduate level, you're simply taught to recognize problem situations. What formula to plug in, how to crank a handle. Didn't seem like much of a challenge. Certainly there's more challenging stuff going on on the frontiers in physics, I'm sure. But I wasn't wildly keen on that. And that was a time in Britain and over here that there was a lot of student social activism, demonstrations and so forth. And I got more interested in humans and their societies as a subject of study. I really wanted to do something in the journalism-side of things. In Britain that's really difficult, as opposed to over here, where you kind of declare a major but you can take a whole range of courses. But in Britain you declare a major (it's only three years; it's not four years), you go into university and you declared what subjects you were going to do ahead of time. And you just do courses in that; you don't do courses in anything else. So in my case I was trained to do physics; I was qualified to do anything else. So it was very difficult to move across. So I trod water a little bit, kind of doing a master's in…science, and then by pure accident ended up reading a coupled of books by anthropologist. Kind of realized, "Geeze, this is really what I want to do." And that's when I got even luckier in many ways, in that it just so happened, that the University of Manchester Anthropology Department actually had a master's program specifically for people like me. I don't know of any other university in the UK that had that program, but it just happened to be there, where I had done my undergraduate and master's of science degree. And so they took me in, and what I did was I did the final year of the undergraduate curriculum in anthropology and then a one year master's thesis after that. And that confirmed me that's what I wanted to do, and so that's how I originally go into anthropology.

Cilli: And so, at that point you decided to pursue a PhD in anthropology?

Roscoe: Yeah, and that was not easy, because by that point I'd got two master's degrees. In Britain at that time, you got government funding, paying your tuition and paying you a stipend, but by that point I'd used up all of my postgraduate funding. I had my three years of funding for the undergraduate in physics. I'd now used up my funding for graduate studies. And that was a bit of a problem. I'd finally found what I wanted to do, and little opportunity to do it.

Cilli: What is your second master's degree in?

Roscoe: My first was this liberal studies in science, my second was a master's in social anthropology, at Manchester University…. But then I really did want to go on to do the PhD, and there would have been some opportunities at Manchester perhaps. Manchester University department had various ethnographic projects: the Namibia project, the Lebanon project, the Syrian project, the Libyan project. All kind of like, if you were accepted in to them they would have provided funds to go and do field work and write up the thesis. But I'm not sure how good your history is of the mid-1970s was, but at that point Libya was going belly-up under Khadafi, Lebanon was getting into terrible straits, Syria was a difficult place to work in. So, right about the time I was ready to apply, that was all folding up. About the only project that Manchester had left at that point was the Namibia project. But I was fortunate enough that at the department they happened to have this notice on the board that effectively said, "Free money to study at the University of Rochester." So I applied to the University of Rochester, which is in upstate New York. They accepted me and I'm very grateful for that, and I finished up my PhD at the University of Rochester. And this was by the late 70s? I came out, I think officially, my PhD is dated 1983. I kind of finished the think in late 1982.

Cilli: So at that point you applied for faculty positions?

Roscoe: Yeah. And that was a very bad time to be on the market. The early 1980s was a recession, President Reagan was coming in, and there were very few jobs, either in the US or in the UK. At that point I'd become a permanent resident in US and so was eligible to apply for jobs here. And for couple a years I was kind of… I did one year at a William Smith college in upstate New York; I did one year on a Lansbury Fellowship at the American Museum of Natural history in New York City, and then I was really, really fortunate that I got the job up here in the University of Maine, and have been grateful for that ever since.

Cilli: When was it that you came to the University of Maine?

Roscoe: That was in 1984, that I came to the University of Maine.

Cilli: So, you weren't on the job market long.

Roscoe: Two years.

Cilli: I'm curious about how your relationship with the Quaternary Institute began.

Roscoe: I can't remember the dates exactly, Adam. It was sometime in the early 2000s. As you may know the Department of Anthropology has a lot of cross appointments to the Climate Change Institute. I think Dave Sanger was one of the early members of the Quaternary Institute, so I think he was the first one that got a cross appointment. Half of his salary was from the Climate Change, half from Anthropology. So, Anthropology has had strong links to the Institute.

It's always been the archeologists who have had the cross appointments, and the cultural anthropologists haven't really been involved with the Quaternary Institute as it was then, simply because we don't do Quaternary stuff, really. But I forget the exact way in which the dates meshed, but for a number of years Dave Sanger was suggesting I might be interested in joining the Climate Change Institute in some kind of capacity. Although I'm a cultural anthropologist, I've had an interest in the theoretical side of archeology. Because New Guinea is a terrific material laboratory for trying to understand the mechanisms and processes that structure and organize small-scale societies, and it's also a great laboratory for ethnographic analogies about the early stages of political and cultural evolution. So I've always been interested in New Guinea ethnography from that perspective. And Dave kind of, for two or three years, suggested I should think of joining the Climate Change Institute. And then I think there was a point at which Paul Mayewski joined the Institute, and it began to get this growing focus on climate change. And by that point I too had become interested in climate change. Climate change has kind of been on my horizon since the late-1980s. You know, people just worrying about what was going to happen. So I kept my eye on that for quite a long time. So, I can't remember exactly when I joined, but at some point in the early 2000s I applied for cooperating professor status, went over there and gave a talk on the special report on mission scenarios that undergirds the last two sets of IPCC reports, and people seemed to like the talk, and I was accepted in there. And I spent a lot of time going to lectures, talking to folks over there, with my main aim trying to get somewhat on top of the natural sciences of climate change, with a view on what one can do as a social scientist, on the human dimensions of climate change. And that's actually been a hell of a struggles, just trying to get a reasonably secure hold on all of the natural science implications of climate change and also kind of the drivers of climate change. Is kind of quite a lot of study in itself, to begin to get somewhere where you feel relatively confident that you understand the basic processes, the prehistory of it, and then kind of beginning to try and get a hold on what the human drivers of anthropogenic greenhouse gas emissions are. This all then has to come from that, you know, trying to get on top of that literature, which in the last five to eight years has suddenly exploded, and it's not just in anthropology. But there's lots of really interesting kind of climate change human dimensions research, that's been going on in psychology, for example. The American Psychological Association in 2010 produced this spectacularly good report on the links between human psychology and climate change; a whole bunch of different dimensions. There's a whole bunch of sociologists that got really interested in what can sociology do to contribute to understanding the human dimensions of climate change. And I kind of, in about the last three years, I finally got to that position where I thought, "okay, I'm actually qualified now to start writing about this, and indeed I've just had a paper accepted for the *American Anthropologist*, which is our flagship journal, which is pretty gratifying. And now I'm working on some other stuff. It's very anthropologically-oriented, but there's things that anthropology (with its universal perspective, taking all human societies as our database), there's some things we're kind of uniquely qualified to do. And that's kind of where I am at the moment. I finally managed to get the momentum, having got on top of a really large literature, to feel like I can now start writing about this.

Cilli: So, tell me a little bit about your latest article.

Roscoe: It's actually it's kind of a special report on a mission scenario that came out in 2000. The IPCC report is coming out, and the last two tried to predict how's climate change going to develop over the next hundred years. And you kind of got two sorts of models that you have to

use to be able to do that. On the one hand you've got your physical model of how the climate works, and our climate research at the Climate Change Institute, contributed a lot to that….So, you've got these massive models that deal with the climate system itself. Then, kind of like, over the last couple of hundred years or so, what some people are calling the anthropocene. You've got growing production of these anthropogenic greenhouse gases that are affecting the climate. So you've got these other models that the IPPC has to use, which is trying to model how human society is going to develop over the next hundred years, to try and figure out how much greenhouse gas emissions can we expect by 2030, 2050, 2100. Those models are what I focus on, and god bless them they've done their done their best. To model human thought and action is incredibly complex, probably the most complex thing in this part of the galaxy. They've done their best to model it, but from many social scientists' point of view, those models are incredibly primitive. They're very economically reductionist. In other words, they reduce human behavior to economic models. They take virtually no account of how politics works among humans and how that might affect the future. They don't even mention the human ideological realm. Large numbers of humans on earth believe in various sorts of gods and spirits, and that has a significant impact on how they're going to behave into the future. Indeed, whether they're even going to recognize climate change. You know, a big section of the American evangelical community refuses to believe that there is climate change, because they're going by scripture and they've got a completely different interpretation. And that's not taken into account as well. And that's what I've been focusing in on, is from an anthropological point of view, is there something we can predict about how people's religious ideologies will affect their behavior. One of the papers I'm now working on is, if you look at the IPCC's projections of the effects of severe climate change, if we don't do anything about anthropogenic gases… there's going to be severe meteorological consequences. When you look at what those are, they match closely with what a lot of the world's religions associate with the End Times. So the article I'm putting together is kind of like to what degree will people around the world interpret that as being the End Times, the Apocalypse, as opposed to recognizing it as climate change. And we might kind of say, well that might be places like Africa and Asia and that sort of thing. But of course you've got 44 percent of the US population that believes Christ will return to earth within their own or within their children's life times. So it's not just in other countries. So the effects of severe climate change could be a tremendous influence on a large section of our population. They will interpret it as Christ is about to return and act in ways that might not be terribly helpful to mitigation and adaptation efforts. So that's one thing I'm working on, with the paper that's being accepted in *American Anthropologist*, I kind of took a couple of the major dimensions of uncertainty in the SRES model and pointed out that if the folks who put those models together had actually taken any notice of the anthropological and archeological literature, they would have been able to radically reduce the level of uncertainty of their projections over the next hundred years. And the paper also pointed out that the areas of research that anthropology could do to reduce the level of uncertainty.

Cilli: Have you had many opportunities to do research with other members of the Institute?

Roscoe: Not really. It's more kind of been me learning from them. Kirk Maasch, for example, has been useful in putting together this American Anthropologist paper. But every now and again we're at a retreat and I'm asking him something else about the IPCC modeling procedures. And Kirk, God bless him, has been awfully useful, cause he's got a general hold on the modeling procedures, and he's been particularly useful in alerting me to flaws in IPCC models…. So, Kirk

has been very useful. Otherwise it's the archeologists I've interacted with, in actually talking about my research. But it's still been enormously helpful to have those climate change scientists over there.

Cilli: So what exactly is your role as a cooperating professor?

Roscoe: That's a good question, really. [laughs] It means I belong to the Institute; I'm a voting member; I go to climate change faculty meetings. I should either attend or contributed to the Borns Symposium. I normally would go on the field trip, although for the last two or three years I've not been able to do that. One of the ways I've been much more engaged with the actual teaching of the Institute, is that myself and Kristen Sobolek kind of were part of the team that put together that IGERT on adaptation to abrupt climate change. So, Kristen and I contributed a number of pages to the proposal, which was successful. We have two of those IGERT students in our new anthropology and environmental policy PhD. I'm also teaching the graduate-level human dimensions of climate change course for the IGERT. So with IGERT I've become much more integrated with some of the things that are going on over there. I contribute regularly with their research colloquia, where we discuss research papers in climate change and adaptation to climate change. We have two retreats a year, and I attend those. And that kind of has grown out of my cooperating professor status.

Cilli: Do you have a joint appointment with the Department of Anthropology and CCI?

Roscoe: No, all of my budget line comes through anthropology. So because of that, I teach four courses a year, as opposed to our archeologists, who have joint appointments with CCI and teach only three courses a year, and a heavy research expectation, because part of their teaching is bought out by the Climate Change Institute, which is a research Institute.

Cilli: What do you think has been the Institute's greatest contribution to climate science?

Roscoe: I'm probably not the best qualified person to answer that question, but I would have said pretty clearly, would be the ice cores and stuff that Paul Mayewski and his team have been doing in capturing those ice cores and analyzing those ice cores. Those ice cores have been tremendously influential in alerting us to the presence of abrupt climate change…. My understanding is that once the GISP2 ice cores, which Paul was heavily involved in, once they got those and found major fluctuations in climate… people started taking rapid or abrupt climate change seriously. Of course, Paul and his team had a very significant input to that. And their constantly coring every damn piece of ice they can find. [laughs] And that's been heavily influential I think. But there's other people in the Institute who can do the ecological side of this. Dan Sandweiss in our department did some quite influential work, back in the early 90s. What he did was, using archeological evidence, he showed the whole El Nino effect had started about 5,800 years ago. Before that people thought it had been going on for donkey's years. Dan always cautions me, saying, "it didn't necessarily start. It might have been lower frequencies, with not so much of a magnitude, prior to that." But the mega-El Ninos we get every hundred years (I believe they're speeding up), those are all post-5,800 years ago. And Dan's work examining shells on the Peruvian coast was key to discovering that. So you've got other things that were fairly influential as well, but if I had to pick one my guess would be the ice core library and the ice core activities.

Cilli: It seems to me that within the scientific community there's no debate about the human role in climate change, but outside the scientific community there is. And I'm wondering if you can comment as to why that might be the case.

Roscoe: I can't really comment because it's an area that hasn't been researched very well. There's a lot of work that's been done in communication studies. There is the idea that one of the problems is that scientists haven't communicated their findings clearly enough to the population. And there's an element to that, that yeah, we could do a better job in making everything clearer, and if we did that climate change denial will go away. But from an anthropological point of view, we look at that and we see far more social/cultural processes involved than, it's a lack of communication. There's all of these dynamics going on. It's not just that people don't understand climate change; they have active reasons for opposing it. And those reasons are very varied. In the psychology literature, there's some very good research on the psychology literature, on human ego defense mechanisms…. People kind of seeing these phenomena in moral terms and moral systems not very well adapted to seeing it clearly. You've got other obvious things, kind of the political forces, where it's in their interest to keep climate change denial going. Otherwise they start losing money, big time. That kind of is keeping the whole climate change denial, or at the very least the uncertainty about whether climate change is fueling that. You've got these whole cosmological world-view problems as well. To be able to accept that climate change is occurring, you have to have a world-view that allows you to believe that climate can actually change. If you believe that climate is governed by god, you aren't going to believe that climate is changing, and even if you accept that, you're going to think "well, it's god will whether we can mitigate that." And then one thing that, when I was teaching the human dimensions of climate change course last spring, that I think is way under examined in the literature, is the role of the media. Not just the media doing a poor job in communicating, but many media outlets have an interest in propagating the idea that climate change is a hoax. There's a wonderful book written by a British doctor, called *Bad Science*, and he has two chapters where he deals with the MMR fiasco in Britain. About twenty years ago there was a doctor called Andrew Wakefield who published a very small sample study that seemed to suggest that that MMR vaccine caused autism in a number of kids. And the science was poor. In fact Wakefield has been struck off the medical registers in Britain because he acted very unethically with the data. A lot of scientific research showed that there was absolutely no risk at all. And yet they couldn't get that out because several of the tabloid newspapers, the *Daily Mail*, for example, a couple of the Murdock outlets, kept propagating the idea that it was a major threat. You've got a whole coterie of moms worried about their kids, and saying we're not going to have our kids vaccinated. And exactly the same kind of thing is going on with climate change. And actually one of the papers involved in Britain is the *Daily Mail*. And of course over here it's Fox News, where they can get eyeballs on the screen or on the page by fostering the idea that it's a hoax and that we don't have to worry about it. These journalists, they know what they're doing. They know that climate change is real, but the bigger priority for them is to get eyeballs on the screen or eyeballs on the page. And that process hasn't been given the emphasis it deserves I think. There's just a lot of processes involved, and we don't understand them. And from an anthropological point of view, we also need to look at how this is playing out in India, China, and other places. Europe is doing an extraordinarily good job of actually trying to mitigate climate change. Germany is now carpeted with windmills, as an alternative source of energy. The culture over there for some reason is more conducive to accept that climate change is real than is the culture here in the United States.

Cilli: Well, that’s all the questions I have but before the interview I did want to give you an opportunity to share something that I didn’t ask you about.

Roscoe: That was a pretty good set of questions. The only thing I can add, Adam, is that I do feel very fortunate to have ended up with the University of Maine, and I feel very fortunate that in some ways I’m paid to do my hobby: I love doing research. But particularly given my background, given the existential threat that climate change poses to us, I do fortunate that I happened into a university and slot where I could combine these things to be able to work on climate change, which I feel is a major threat to humanity. And humanity is sleepwalking towards disaster at the moment. I feel very fortunate to just have that kind of structure situation where I could plug into things that really interest me. I still have a lot of anthropological interests. I’m very interested in the anthropology of war. And I’m very interested in the anthropology of war in New Guinea and the effects of war on social structure, and I found it very useful to have this aspect of my research, which is on a subject that I think is extremely important. And the Climate Change Institute, has been a very good set of colleagues. I profited greatly from it.

Cilli: Well, thank you again for participating in this interview.

Roscoe: Sure, my pleasure.